Louisa May Alcott
The Contemporary reviews
Edited by Beverly Lyon Clark
The American Critical Archives is a series of reference books that provides representative selections of contemporary reviews of the main works of major American authors. Specifically, each volume contains both full reviews and excerpts from reviews that appeared in newspapers and weekly and monthly periodicals, generally within a few months of the publication of the work concerned. There is an introductory historical overview by a volume editor, as well as checklists of additional reviews located but not quoted.

This collection of nineteenth-century reviews provides a wealth of new information for scholars interested in Alcott (increasing the number of indexed reviews almost tenfold) and also insight into the ways in which reading audiences were constructed in the nineteenth-century United States. The reviews provide a window on to nineteenth-century attitudes toward popular fiction and toward women writers. The author of novels and of sensational tales, of travel writing and of a temperance tract, Alcott was both highly popular and highly respected. Her works were reviewed not just in magazines for children, but also in the most prestigious literary journals of the day.
Louisa May Alcott

The Contemporary Reviews

Edited by
Beverly Lyon Clark
Wheaton College
For Roger, Adam, and Wendy
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Series editor’s preface</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flower Fables</strong> (1855; reprinted, with additions, as <em>The Frost King</em>, vol. 2 of <em>Lulu’s Library</em>, 1887)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hospital Sketches</strong> (1863; reprinted in <em>Hospital Sketches and Camp and Fireside Stories</em>, 1869)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On Picket Duty, and Other Tales</strong> (1864)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moods</strong> (1865; revised edition, 1882)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Morning Glories, and Other Stories</strong> (1868, 1871)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kitty’s Class-Day; Aunt Kipp; Psyche’s Art</strong> (1868; reprinted together in <em>Louisa May Alcott’s Proverb Stories</em>, 1868)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Little Women; or, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy</strong> (Part 1, 1868; Part 2, 1869)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>An Old-Fashioned Girl</strong> (1870)</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Little Men: Life at Plumfield with Jo’s Boys</strong> (1871)</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My Boys</strong>, vol. 1 of <em>Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag</em> (London, 1871; 1872)</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shawl-Straps</strong>, vol. 2 of <em>Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag</em> (1872)</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work: A Story of Experience</strong> (1873)</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cupid and Chow-Chow</strong>, vol. 3 of <em>Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag</em> (1874)</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eight Cousins; or, The Aunt-Hill</strong> (1875)</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Silver Pitchers; and Independence, A Centennial Love Story</strong> (1876)</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rose in Bloom; A Sequel to “Eight Cousins”</strong> (1876)</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Modern Mephistopheles</strong> (1877; reprinted with <em>A Whisper in the Dark</em>, 1889)</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My Girls</strong>, vol. 4 of <em>Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag</em> (1878)</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Under the Lilacs</strong> (1878)</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jimmy’s Cruise in the Pinafore</strong>, vol. 5 of <em>Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag</em> (1879)</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jack and Jill: A Village Story</strong> (1880)</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving</strong>, vol. 6 of <em>Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag</em> (1882)</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spinning-Wheel Stories</strong> (1884)</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Christmas Dream, vol. 1 of Lulu’s Library (1886)</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo’s Boys, and How They Turned Out: A Sequel to “Little Men” (1886)</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Garland for Girls (1888)</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recollections, vol. 3 of Lulu’s Library (1889)</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic Tragedies, Written by “Jo” and “Meg” and Acted by the “Little Women” (1893)</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The American Critical Archives series documents a part of a writer’s career that is usually difficult to examine, that is, the immediate response to each work as it was made public on the part of reviewers in contemporary newspapers and journals. Although it would not be feasible to reprint every review, each volume in the series reprints a selection of reviews designed to provide the reader with a proportionate sense of the critical response, whether it was positive, negative, or mixed. Checklists of other known reviews are also included to complete the documentary record and allow access for those who wish to do further reading and research.

The editor of each volume has provided an introduction that surveys the career of the author in the context of the contemporary critical response. Ideally, the introduction will inform the reader in brief of what is to be learned by a reading of the full volume. The reader then can go as deeply as necessary in terms of the kind of information desired – be it about a single work, a period in the author’s life, or the author’s entire career. The intent is to provide quick and easy access to the material for students, scholars, librarians, and general readers.

When completed, the American Critical Archives should constitute a comprehensive history of critical practice in America, and in some cases England, as the writers’ careers were in progress. The volumes open a window on the patterns and forces that have shaped the history of American writing and the reputations of the writers. These are primary documents in the literary and cultural life of the nation.

M. Thomas Inge
Acknowledgments

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I am likewise grateful to Leslie Morris and her staff at the Houghton Library, Harvard University; Jean Rainwater and the rest of the staff at the John Hay Library, Brown University Library; Laura Wasowicz and the rest of the staff at the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester; and the staff at the newspaper micro-text room at the Boston Public Library. And I am grateful to Martha Mitchell and Marcia Grimes for their intrepid seeking of interlibrary loan venues; to Linnea Hendrickson, who worked with me on the early research for this book, as we created a bibliography of secondary materials for “Little Women” and the Feminist Imagination; and to Madeleine Stern, whose 1950 biography of Alcott is still the standard one and whose 1996 bibliography of Alcott’s works, published in the reprinted biography, is the most authoritative one to date.
Introduction

At the start of her career Louisa May Alcott followed the reviews of her books with interest. In January 1865 she writes in her journal, “Notices of ‘Moods’ came from all directions, & though people didn’t understand my ideas owing to my shortening the book so much, the notices were mostly favorable & gave quite as much praise as was good for me.” Yet she seems not to have dwelled long on the reviews even then: to James Redpath, who published Hospital Sketches in 1863, she writes, “I send the few notices I have kept, but as I do not see many papers I have not much to offer in the way of vanities, though I often hear others speak of notices they have seen.” She continued to track reviews with some interest in the early 1870s – whether she herself clipped the ones that have survived and are now in the Houghton Library at Harvard University, or they were clipped by family members and friends, or they were sent by her publisher with an eye to advertising copy.

As for the reviews themselves – although Alcott’s Flower Fables garnered several notices when it appeared in 1855 (more later, in 1887, when it was retitled and augmented), her first book to receive serious attention from reviewers was Hospital Sketches (1863), a slightly fictionalized account of her experience as a Civil War nurse in Washington, D.C. The reviewer for the New-York Tribune may have been uncomfortable with the foregrounding of “the comic aspects of hospital life,” but most reviewers agreed with the Boston Evening Transcript in finding the book “[f]luent and sparkling in style, with touches of quiet humor and lively wit, relieving what would otherwise be a topic too sombre and sad.”

The success of Hospital Sketches paved the way for the publication of Moods (1865), a novel that Alcott had drafted years before. The reviews were mixed. Some reviewers objected to the querying of marriage in this novel of ideas. Others regretted the unhappiness of the ending or “the elaborate agony of these self-analyzing, self-tormenting heroines” so favored by “[o]ur lady-writers,” in the words of the reviewer for the Independent. A few saw great promise despite some imperfections. The British Reader found this contribution to “the transcendental school of novels” of “thrilling and varied interest,” with a style “graphic and simple.” Henry James, “utterly weary of stories about precocious little girls” and severely critical of the portrait of the dominant male character, concluded his long contribution to the North American Review by admitting,
haltingly, “With the exception of two or three celebrated names, we know not, indeed, to whom, in this country, unless to Miss Alcott, we are to look for a novel above the average.”

In 1868 Alcott began publishing collections of fugitive pieces for children, in Morning Glories and various editions of Proverb Stories: reviewers found them “charming” and “delightful” and written with “exquisite grace” (this last probably cribbed from the publisher’s boilerplate). More significantly, in 1868 Alcott also published Part 1 of Little Women. The book was quite positively received: reviewers found it “capital” and indeed suitable for the old as well as the young. In the words of the Commonwealth, it was “the source of infinite pleasure to all readers.” But it wasn’t until Part 2 (also known as Good Wives and Little Women Wedded) appeared in 1869 that reviewers fully appreciated what had become a best-selling phenomenon. Alcott’s writing in Part 2 was described repeatedly as “fresh” and “natural.” Many would agree with the reviewer for the Hartford Daily Courant: “She is brilliant, witty, has remarkable descriptive powers, and is as eminently successful in collating the sympathies of the reader as almost any writer that we now have.” Despite the “limited field” of her domestic setting, the reviewer in the Eclectic Magazine nevertheless called Little Women “the very best of books to reach the hearts of the young of any age from six to sixty.”

The early wave of interest in Alcott’s work crested in 1870, with the publication of An Old-Fashioned Girl. Her writing was still described as “fresh” and “natural”: in the words of the reviewer for the Richmond Whig and Advertiser, “There never was a writer who could render common chit-chat with the naturalness of Miss Alcott.” The reviewer for the Boston Daily Evening Transcript found in her “a genius for naturalness.” Yet US reviewers were also starting to criticize Alcott’s use of the vernacular, finding her language too slangy at times, too ungrammatical at others. The expostulation over the ungrammatical, over “such blunders – or rather such vulgarisms” – reaches a climax in the Eastern Argus review, in which the reviewer is ultimately rendered typographically incoherent (in reprinting the review I have offered bracketed regularizations for only the most egregious errors).

Several 1870 reviewers also sounded another note that would recur: Alcott’s domestic stories lacked what they conceived of as a plot. The reviewer for the Atlantic Monthly found the book “almost inexplicably pleasing, since it is made up of such plain material, and helped off with no sort of adventure or sensation.” A writer for an unidentified newspaper in the Harvard collection stated that Alcott “has shown the rare faculty of connecting a series of matter-of-fact incidents that may and actually do occur, without any of the monotony that attaches to the best and liveliest of social or domestic circles.”

Many of the reviewers of Little Men (1871), the sequel to Little Women, found it not as brilliant as its predecessor but delightful nonetheless. Reviewers
were increasingly focusing on what Alcott was teaching—in this story about school—whether they agreed with her pedagogy or not, perhaps even finding that the book “describes the impossible,” in the words of John Doran, writing for the *Athenaeum*. More judicious is the reviewer for *Scribner’s*: “It is one of the best of the many good points in Miss Alcott’s writing, this teaching fathers and mothers by winning the children first. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings she perfects her lessons, and so subtly that nobody suspects he is being instructed. Didactic would be the last adjective ever applied to her stories.” Later the reviewer asserts, “She is entitled to greater praise as an artist than has been bestowed upon her; ultimately she will be recognized as the very best painter, *en genre*, of the American domestic life in the middle classes; the very faithfulness, the aliveness—there ought to be that word—of her pictures prevents their having full justice done them at once . . .”

In late 1871 Alcott launched the first of her six volumes of *Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag*, taking on, in the title, the persona of her character Jo March Bhaer. Most of the stories in these “semi-juvenile” collections, as *Godey’s Lady’s Book* characterized the first one, are addressed primarily to children—though the second volume, *Shawl-Straps* (1872), is in the genre of humorous travel writing, of the sort popularized by Mark Twain in *Innocents Abroad* (1869), and the audience is harder to classify. The reviewers of *Shawl-Straps* praised this “book of travel with most of the travel left out” (*Boston Daily Advertiser*) for its “humor” or for being “jolly” or “vivacious.” Yet the collections generally received less attention than Alcott’s other works did. Many reviewers would concur with that for the *Springfield Daily Republican*, who, in a review of the third volume, called Alcott “an easy, humorous and humane writer.”

The next crest of reviewing attention coincided with the publication of *Work* (1873), a book now generally seen as addressing adults, though at least some contemporary reviewers saw this “serious” and “earnest” book as addressing both young and old. A number of reviewers found Alcott here engaged in something “higher” than what she had done before, though it’s not always clear whether they were lauding her for writing a novel for adults rather than a story for children, a novel that ranged beyond the domestic settings of most of her previous work, a work of greater artistic merit than she had hitherto published, or a work that engaged with fundamental issues of the time, such as the woman question. Many nineteenth-century readers felt that all literature, that for adults as well as that for children, should instruct as well as delight: tempted still to consider most novels frivolous and therefore suspect, they welcomed the novel of ideas and novels that nourished aspirations for the ideal. Few novels of the era elicited such a panoply of views regarding the balancing of instruction and delight—not to mention diverse perspectives on what instruction was desirable—as does *Work*. The reviewer for the *Nation* excoriated the book for being “nothing as a work of art”; that for the *Lakeside Monthly*, for sending the wrong messages—for praising work, for attributing humanity to
black mothers, for portraying an admirable white woman as insufficiently selfless. More typical is enthusiasm, even if tempered, such as the response of the British Bookseller: “Crowded with absurdities, incongruities, and inconsequent incidents, this novel is, nevertheless, most delightful reading.”

The last work published under Alcott’s name to receive sustained attention was *Eight Cousins* (1875), and some of the most considered responses to her literature for children, whether positive or negative, appear in these reviews. Does Alcott write with blameworthy carelessness, what with her “worried . . . most to death” and her “laughing so he spilt his tea” and her “spoil for a dance,” to cite just a few presumed solecisms noted by reviewers? Or is she, as the *Scribner’s* reviewer claimed, “one of the few women who can make not merely small children but even college Sophomores talk with something of the raciness of real life”? Is her work inferior when it does not rely on a linear plot, or do “plots too often have a well-rounded completeness that suggests unreality,” as the *Overland Monthly* reviewer urged, “whereas Miss Alcott’s stories are too life-like to have smooth sailing throughout the voyage”? Does she inculcate insufficient veneration for children’s “pastors and masters,” as Henry James charged in his review for the *Nation*, or is it indeed this inversion of “the old nursery traditions of infallibility” that “inclines the hearts of young readers to her,” as the *Athenaeum* reviewer suggested?

By the time of *Eight Cousins* and its sequel, *Rose in Bloom* (1876), reviewers were trying to enforce the barriers between literature for children and that for their “pastors and masters” more forcefully than they had before. The *Literary World* reviewer of the sequel accused Alcott of “torturing [children’s] little hearts with the agonies of love.” For some reviewers courtship and what was called love-making, a courting that now would be considered very tame indeed, was definitely off-limits in a story for children. In short, reviews of *Rose in Bloom* give play to faultlines between novel and story: novels and courtship were for adults; stories, for children.

In 1877 Roberts Brothers, Alcott’s publishers since 1868, published her anonymous *A Modern Mephistopheles* in their No Name Series. Reviewers leaped at the chance to guess the identity of the author. It had to be someone in the Roberts Brothers stable, in that era when established writers rarely jumped from publisher to publisher. Was it Harriet Prescott Spofford? Or Julian Hawthorne, son of the more famous Nathaniel? It had to have been written by a man. Or, no, a woman. *A Modern Mephistopheles*, a gothic tale of intrigue and passion, was unlike anything on which Alcott’s name had appeared. And few guessed her authorship. As for substantive responses, some reviewers simply couldn’t stomach the book’s somewhat gothic mode; others reveled in its force and power, several comparing it to a poem. Some couldn’t stand that it wasn’t more upbeat. Others adored the impossibly virtuous ingenue, Gladys, declaring her indeed the most true to life of the characters. Some, such as the reviewer
for the *Atlantic Monthly*, the most prestigious of the nineteenth-century literary journals in the United States, praised *A Modern Mephistopheles* more than they ever praised works published under Alcott’s own name.

Meanwhile, as her health and family commitments taxed her strength (medicine with which she’d been dosed as a Civil War nurse gave her mercury poisoning, from which she suffered the rest of her life), Alcott was turning increasingly to collections of short stories as a way of responding to readers’ demands for a new Alcott every Christmas: the six volumes of *Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag* (1871–82), *Silver Pitchers* (1876), *Spinning-Wheel Stories* (1884), the three volumes of *Lulu’s Library* (1886–1889), *A Garland for Girls* (1888). These were interspersed with the odd novel (or what some contemporaries would call a story) – *Under the Lilacs* in 1878, *Jack and Jill* in 1880. Most of these books primarily targeted a child audience: by 1875, when she published *Eight Cousins*, the *Overland Monthly* claimed that Alcott had “fairly won the title of ‘The Children’s Friend.’” Yet reviewers continued to stress that her writing appealed to both old and young.

The adults who would be interested in *Jo’s Boys* (1886), the conclusion of the March family saga that had begun with *Little Women*, were likely to be those who had encountered the first books in the saga a generation earlier, “the fathers and mothers of to-day,” who, according to the *New-York Times*, “will be delighted to meet once more their former acquaintances.” In short, the boundary crossing between literature for adults and that for children happened in slightly different ways during the span of Alcott’s career. Early on, even though Alcott had written *Little Women* with an audience of girls in mind, it definitely appealed to adults too – and to males as well as females: “Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy,” wrote the reviewer of *An Old-Fashioned Girl* in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, “are friends in every nursery and school-room; and even in the parlor and office they are not unknown.” Later, adults might read Alcott partly out of nostalgia for their own childhoods.

The reviews collected here provide insight into the contemporary debates about Alcott’s works – and thereby into the temper of the times, especially the way the nineteenth-century literati constructed literature. It’s a surprise, for twentieth-first-century scholars, to see how widely reviewed – and appreciated – Alcott’s works were. We’re accustomed to a sharp segregation between literature for adults and that for children (and for reviews thereof), and we’re likely to associate Alcott with the latter. Our latterday classifications often diverge from those made in the nineteenth century: we’re now likely to consider *Hospital Sketches* a book for adults, yet in 1869 reviewers considered the book part of a “youths’ library” (*Zion’s Herald*) or stated that it “will be sure to go” into the hands of those who had read *Little Women* (*National Anti-Slavery Standard*); Caroline Hewins recommended it as a book “for the young” in 1882; a thirteen year old, writing in 1878, had as a matter of course read not just *Little Women*
and *Eight Cousins* but also *Hospital Sketches*. From a nineteenth-century perspective, Alcott wrote “of all the phases of youth – of bridal and of schools and of ‘little men’ and of young mothers,” to quote the review of *Lulu’s Library* (vol. 1) for the British *Saturday Review*. The boundary between literature for children and that for adults was fluid in the nineteenth century, in complex ways that can be at least partly mapped in the reviews reprinted here.

Alcott also published in a broad array of genres – from sensational tales to travel writing, from a temperance tract to serious adult fiction. Reviews of her work appeared not just in the *Youth’s Companion* but in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and the *Journal of Health* and the *Catholic World* – and in such bastions of elite culture as the *Atlantic*, *Harper’s*, the *Nation*, the *Critic*, and the *Literary World*. Reviewers and commentators included Henry James, Lyman Abbott, Harriet Prescott Spofford, Mark Twain, and “the hundreds of boys and girls” (only briefly sampled here) who wrote to the children’s magazine *St. Nicholas* in praise of Alcott.

The reviews also hint at publishing practices. In this era when ideas of copyright were more fluid than they are now, and newspapers would think nothing of reprinting material that had appeared elsewhere, it's possible that a review that reappears, unattributed, in newspaper after newspaper, is copied from a newspaper, but it’s more likely, especially given the recurrence of some phrases in still other reviews, that it is copied from the publisher’s news release. Certainly, as Susan R. Gannon points out, Roberts Brothers was skilled in the art of keeping Alcott’s name before the public; the firm made sure that information on what Alcott was working on now or the state of her health or when she was sailing to or from Europe was available to newspapers for their “Literary News” columns.

Finally, the reviews suggest how very popular Alcott’s works were – and give insight into nineteenth-century attitudes toward popularity, at this time when the canon was configured rather differently from the way it is now, and esteem and popularity were only starting to seem antithetical in the critical imagination. Certainly Alcott’s works were critically esteemed, especially before about 1875; they were regularly reviewed in all the leading US literary journals and in major British ones as well. They made it onto lists of important works: in 1893 a poll of “best” American books listed *Little Women* 25th, one of only four books by women in the top 40. And Alcott’s works were enormously popular. In 1871 *Little Women* and *An Old-Fashioned Girl* were the most popular books in the largest US lending library; in 1893 only Charles Dickens’ novels were more circulated than Alcott’s in US public libraries. In 1947 Frank Luther Mott lists *Little Men* as one of the three best sellers of 1871 and *Little Women* as one of the 21 best sellers in US history.

In the collection that follows I have limited myself almost exclusively to reviews. Space constraints have made it impossible to include longer commentaries.
The “Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices” at the end of most chapters lists other short reviews and mentions of a given work, notices that sometimes offer a word or two of praise. Most of Alcott’s book-length works published after 1870 first appeared in magazines, and some of the reviews and notices are of these versions.

I have not corrected errors of fact in the reprinted texts, such as the misattribution of the person who had encouraged Alcott to stick to her teaching instead of writing – it was not a publisher to whom she’d shown *Little Women* but the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* – or the attribution of a son instead of a daughter to Christie of *Work* or the use of the honorific *Mrs.* instead of *Miss* before Alcott’s name. Nor have I corrected the various misspellings of her name (Alcot, Allcott, Olcott, and especially Louise) or of those of most of her characters (Jo frequently became Joe). In some respects these errors are symptomatic of the kinds of attention paid Alcott’s work and indeed of her prominence: her name was less likely to be misspelled as she became better known, though British periodicals continued to call her Mrs. I give the titles of periodicals as they appear on mastheads or title pages in a given year, though not the subtitles. The absence of a volume or issue number usually means that one did not appear on the title page or masthead; in a few cases I was simply unable to verify the volume or issue number for a piece that I obtained through interlibrary loan. When a review prints the title of a book in uppercase, I have given it in italics. In most cases, however, I have followed the typography of the original review, retaining idiosyncratic punctuation; nor have I corrected such usage errors as subject/verb disagreement or misplaced modifiers. I have, however, supplied emendations for most misspellings, though not for variants current in the nineteenth century (*Shakspeare*, *dulness*, and the like); and I have proffered bracketed guesses for missing letters and words when the copy I’ve consulted has been torn or blotched. In reproducing the reviews I have silently omitted headings and introductory sentences that simply provide bibliographical information and also final lines or sentences indicating publisher and local bookseller and maybe price.

One of the pleasures of working on this volume has been the opportunity for treasure hunting provided by the Alcott Clippings File in the Houghton Library. Most of the reviews preserved in the File are of uncertain or unknown provenance; this collection supplies bibliographical information for some of these. Untraced reviews appear here with the notation “Clippings File.” Some are reprinted with guesses as to provenance: perhaps a hastily scrawled “Jl.” suggests the word *Journal* in the title of the periodical, or a fragment of a masthead indicates that it was one of the many nineteenth-century periodicals whose first word was *Christian*; perhaps advertisements on the reverse suggest a newspaper published in Massachusetts; perhaps a book is listed as available from a bookseller located in Rochester, New York; perhaps internal evidence suggests that a review was published in England.

xvii
Notes


3 Years earlier, before the success of *Little Women*, Alcott had published a number of anonymous and pseudonymous thrillers, most of them in story-papers. I have been unable to find reviews of these sensation stories, as they were called – except for an editorial comment accompanying the reprinting of her early “The Rival Prima Donnas” (*Saturday Evening Gazette*, 11 November 1854) thirty-three years later: “Its style is florid, and it belongs to that class of old-fashioned tales in which plot and incident were considered of more importance than the portrayal of character . . .” (Alcott Clippings File, Houghton Library, Harvard University).


5 Indeed many reviews appeared in sectarian publications: the Unitarian *Liberal Christian*, the Methodist Episcopalian *Ladies’ Repository* (Cincinnati), the Congregationalist *Independent*.

6 “The Letter-Box,” *St. Nicholas* 10.2 (December 1882): 188.


8 Consider the appearance of Alcott’s name in a single month and a half in a single newspaper, the New York *Evening Post* (and that one not the hometown paper of the Concord- and Boston-based Alcott). Now this was a particularly active month and a half, from mid-May to the end of June 1873, for *Work* was published in June. But Alcott’s appearance, at least eleven times, is telling nonetheless. On May 16th we learn, in the “Literary” column, that Alcott’s book is due out June 1st; on May 31st, in the front-page report of the paper’s Boston correspondent, that the demand has been so great that publication has been delayed until the 15th. The book is reviewed at length in that same column on June 10th, and is listed among the “Books Received” on June 13th. Then there are at least six advertisements: early in June they simply announce the title; later they quote from reviews, including those in the *Commonwealth*, the *Springfield Republican*, and the *Evening Post* itself. Finally, just to keep the pot boiling, the “Literary” column on June 9th announces that Alcott is at work on (the never-completed) *The Cost of an Idea*.

9 “The Best American Books,” *Critic* n.s. 19 (3 June 1893). At the top of the list are Emerson’s essays, *The Scarlet Letter*, and Longfellow’s poems.


11 *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 309, 8. *Eight Cousins* and *Jo’s Boys* are among the “better” sellers, putting them among the top seven or eight sellers for 1875 and 1886,
respectively (322, 323). The numbers provided in Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy’s “The Sales of Louisa May Alcott’s Books,” *Harvard Library Bulletin* n.s. 1.1 (Spring 1990): 47–86, suggest that *An Old-Fashioned Girl* also belongs on Mott’s list of best sellers.

FLOWER FABLES (1855; REPRINTED, WITH ADDITIONS, AS THE FROST KING, VOL. 2 OF LULU’S LIBRARY, 1887)
**Boston Evening Transcript**  

It contains several agreeable sketches, in prose and verse, adapted to the capacity of intelligent young persons.

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**Saturday Evening Gazette**  
(23 December 1854): [2].

Very sweet are these little legends of faery land, which those of our young friends, who are so fond of tales of enchantment, will, we are sure, peruse with avidity. The interest which children take in fairy tales is well known, and the infant mind is more susceptible to truths under such a guise, than in the more direct tales of a moral character.

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**Boston Commonwealth**  

A book that every imaginative child will want to find among her holiday gifts is the new volume in *Lulu's Library* by Louisa M. Alcott. Most of these stories were written while the author was in early youth, and have all the charm of enthusiasm and fancy that might be expected of this friend of the children in the fanciful days of her own youth. They consist of flower fables, and while gratifying the child-love for fairy-lore are wholly free from the objectionable elements of the traditional fairy tale, love and good-will being the key upon which each is pitched. The volume is brilliantly brought out by Roberts Brothers, Boston.

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**The Hartford Courant**  
51.262 (5 November 1887): 2:2.

The best selling book on Roberts’s present list is one that perhaps the older readers of *The Courant* will not give much time to, but which the younger people of course must peruse with satisfaction. I refer to Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s second volume in “Lulu’s Library,” which is published in a neat little book, embellished with engravings that are so very pretty that I wish I could give credit here to the artist who made them.

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**The Christian Register**  

This is another collection of short stories by the author who has so endeared herself to children that the mere mention of her name as its writer will make them long to possess it. There are some good, wholesome lessons, as well as pleasant bits of description, in these volumes that make up “Lulu’s Library.” This number is dedicated to Miss Ellen Emerson.
We like the downright honesty of Miss L. M. Alcott’s preface to *Lulu’s Library*, in which she confesses that most of the stories in the fascinating volumes which compose the series were written when she was sixteen, for her younger sisters, and published afterward under the name of ‘Flower Fables.’ This honest frankness is as reassuring as it is rare, and throws over the stories the interesting light of their exceedingly young authorship, an authorship so young as to be almost romantic, and to place them in the catalogue of literary feats. We envy Miss Alcott the pleasure of reviewing these achievements of her girlhood, and more than all we envy her that with her ripened judgment and long literary experience she can review them now and discover that they still hold their own in the front rank of their class.

Another volume of Louise M. Alcott’s charming fairy tales is before us. These stories are inscribed to Ellen T. Emerson, “one of the good fairies who still remain to us, beloved by poets, little children and many grateful hearts.” Most of these stories were written for Miss Alcott’s little sisters and the little Emersons and Channings. They appeared under the name of “Flower Fables” some years ago, and are now republished for these children’s children. “Lily-bell and Thistledown,” “Ripple, the Water Sprite,” and many others of these stories are full of poetry and imagination, and will delight the heart of the child who loves fairy stories and enjoys having everything in Nature personified and made to think and act and talk like a living being. Both volumes i. and ii. of Lulu’s Library are good Christmas presents for the little ones.

The second volume of “Lulu’s Library” by Louise M. Alcott, contains about a dozen fairy tales, written in the author’s youth, and now re-written for this use[]. The little stories are graceful and pretty, and possess that wonderful and attractive flavor which gives to Miss Alcott’s work such a charm, and which perhaps is better described as humanness than as anything else.
interesting to youthful readers. The stories it contains were written when Miss Alcott was sixteen years old, for her younger sisters, the little Emersons and Channings. They were published some years later under the name of “Flower Fables.” The children for whom the stories were originally written have grown up and have children of their own. The fairy tales are now republished with some additions for the amusement of those children’s children by their old friend. The volume contains eleven fairy tales, of the kind dear to the fancies of young folks. It is highest praise to say that they are written by Miss Alcott, the famous “Aunt Jo,” dear to the youthful heart, that they are original in conception, pure in treatment and inspired by a true love of nature in its varied forms.

The Literary World 18.24 (26 November 1887): 426.

There is a youth of the imagination, as of the heart, when the freshly waked fancy revels, as it were, in its own suggestions, when the forming style has as yet acquired no mannerisms; and ambition, usage, and the certainty of success do not, as in later life, play their part in the action of a writer’s mind. To this youthful period belong the little tales which, invented originally for the entertainment of certain beloved small neighbors, Miss Alcott now enlarges for a wider circle under the title of Lulu’s Library. They are fairy tales of the fairy order; but they convey the same kindly and helpful lessons with her later books, and as simpler of construction and keeping more faithfully to the true childish standpoint, we prefer them to those. Some of these little stories are as fresh as charming. Nothing, for example, could be prettier in its way than “Little Bud.”


These are mainly her work when about sixteen years old, written for the entertainment of her young sisters. Young children will like them to-day just as much as those of that time did.

The Dial 8.92 (December 1887): 194.

Miss Louisa M. Alcott, whose name is always a good card of introduction to a child’s heart, has provided a treat for the little ones in “Lulu’s Library,” the second volume of which is now published by Roberts Bros. Most of these stories were originally written for her sisters and their friends, the little Channings and Emersons, and were first published as “Flower Fables.” Now, with added stories, they are republished, as she says “for their children’s children.” They are filled with fairy magic about the birds and flowers and frost, and all the out-of-door world. The little girl in the story of “Brownie and the Princess,” who can understand the talk
of the birds, will be the envy and admiration of many a child.

“Two New Books by Miss Alcott.” *The Literary News* n.s. 8.12 (December 1887): 374.

Two little volumes of short stories are among the good things from dear Louisa M. Alcott. “A Garland for Girls” ($1.25) and “Lulu’s Library, v. 2” ($1), will prove healthy, cheerful reading for young girls. The first is uniform with “Spinning-Wheel Stories” and “Proverb Stories,” the second is a thinner book and for younger children. Bright, interesting tales of natural boys and girls, simply told, all with a good moral undercurrent, may be found in either volume. Miss Jessie McDermott is the illustrator of both.

Zion’s Herald 64.49 (7 December 1887): 386:7.

Here are eleven charming little stories, such as the delightful writer has prepared for her young readers in periodicals. They have interested hundreds when published separately, and will be the comfort of many hundreds more in their present beautiful form.

B., H. B. ([1887?]). Clippings File.

“Most of these stories were written at sixteen,” Miss Alcott tells us, “... [remainder of 2 sentences omitted].” There are eleven stories in this volume, and their very titles will make the young eyes sparkle. What child will not want to know all about “The Frost King, and how the Fairies Conquered Him?” about “The Fairy Sleeping Beauty” and the “Water Sprite?” “Eva’s Visit to Fairyland,” “Sunshine and her Brother and Sisters,” “The Brownie and the Princess,” “The Mermaids” – all appeal to the keen imagination of juvenile hearers. We have often wondered wherein lies the secret of the fascination which Miss Alcott has exercised upon two generations of children. It grows out of the sympathy which enables her to see with the eyes and think with the minds and feel with the hearts of the young people whom she loves. And even the older people, who have almost forgotten the dreams of their youth, listen to these fanciful tales and are beguiled of their cares and grow cheerful and merry. Miss Alcott is a benefactor to young and old, and her books will long be widely read – a source of enjoyment to thousands.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

Littell’s Living Age 44.556 (20 January 1855): 192.
HOSPITAL SKETCHES (1863; REPRINTED IN HOSPITAL SKETCHES AND CAMP AND FIRESIDE STORIES, 1869)
The “Hospital Sketches” by Louisa M. Alcott, which have appeared in the Commonwealth, are productions of uncommon merit. They would grace the pages of the Atlantic or any other magazine. Fluent and sparkling in style, with touches of quiet humor and lively wit, relieving what would otherwise be a topic too sombre and sad, they are graphic in description, and exhibit the healthful sentiments and sympathies of the cheerful heroism that should minister to the sick and suffering. The contrast between the comic incidents, and the tragic experience of a single night, given in No. 2 of the series, is portrayed with singular power and effectiveness. “The Death of John” is a noble and touching picture.

This little book scarcely needs an introduction to our readers, who have already laughed and [wept over those portions?] of it which have been printed in our columns. It now appears in a neat volume, and will find as many readers, we trust, in its new form as in its old. Besides the two additional chapters, we notice that Miss Alcott has added a page here and there, where the fitness of things or the correction of some misunderstanding required it. She dedicates the book to that faithful friend and loyal lady – herself a nurse, Miss Hannah Stevenson of this city.

If this number of our paper had proved to be the last, as we feared, from our Publisher’s account it must be, we were reconciled to the passing away of the Commonwealth, by this among other things, that we have introduced to the great public a book so full of wit, sense and sympathy, as this of Miss Alcott’s.
her friend, Miss Hannah Stevenson,” of Boston – a noble and good woman. They are overflowing with genius, wit, humor, pathos, and womanly compassion and tenderness. All who read them will greatly relish them.


They are received with universal favor.


Graphically drawn. * * * Exceedingly well written – and the graver portions of thrilling interest. There is a quiet vein of humor, too, running all through them, so that the reader is alternately moved to laughter and tears.


One of the most brilliant and engaging books of the season is this, issued from the press of James Redpath of this city, wherein Mrs. L. M. Alcott has given to the public her experiences and observations connected with hospital and Washington life in this time of rebellion. With all the grace, facility, and directness of woman she writes a quantity of humor and strength of phrasing which delights all readers; and while her enlivening wit sparkles in almost every sentence, there is also a quiet undertone that often touches the finest chords of pathos in our nature, and we feel that the touching scenes of hospital life fell not upon a cold heart in Miss Alcott’s presence. But the heartrending facts, in finding expression through this noble woman, do not hide nor destroy her natural genius for the bright and reënlightening lights of life, and in this little volume again we see how a true heart may ever have room for both pity and a cheerful and cheering hope. None who would know the Hospital of today, no sympathizer with his brothers in the field, and no lover of woman, should delay reading this last exemplification of them all.


Most of these Sketches were first printed in the Boston *Commonwealth*, where they won praise from literary men and women of the first ability. The publisher, having agreed to pay the author the usual copyright and resolved to devote at least five cents for every copy sold to the support of orphans made fatherless or homeless by
the war, will not permit any journal to publish any part of the contents. The writer, who is understood to describe scenes of which she was an eye-witness, is the gifted daughter of the Transcendental Philosopher, A. Bronson Alcott.

The Independent 15.771 (10 September 1863): 2:5.

These Sketches first appeared in The Commonwealth. Their wealth of curious humor, graphic picturings of hospital life, strong good sense, and thorough good-heartedness, took such entire possession of their readers, that here they are in a little book. Buy it; it is wonderfully enjoyable, and moreover, a fair copyright is promised to be devoted to the support of orphans of the war.


The somber realities, with which the author of this volume was brought into intimate contact in the discharge of her professional duties as a volunteer nurse in the military hospitals at Washington, were unable to place a check on her exuberant and irrepressible humor. She records her experience in the midst of the saddest scenes which the human eye can witness in a tone of gay, almost rollicking vivacity, which shows wonderful “pluck,” with but slight admixture of feminine weakness. It is not often that a writer ventures to portray the comic aspects of hospital life. But in the present case, the ludicrous features of the occasion are always uppermost, and furnish plenty of materials to a merry fancy and a frolicsome pen.

Here is a description of the jolly nurse’s introduction to Washington:

It was dark when we arrived; and, but for the presence of another friendly gentleman, I should have yielded myself a helpless prey to the first overpowering hackman, who insisted that I wanted to go just where I didn’t. [Remainder of 3 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

Her initiation into the duties of the hospital is set forth in a similar mirthful vein.

The first thing I met was a regiment of the vilest odors that ever assaulted the human nose, and took it by storm. [Remainder of 8 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

But not all her “happy-go-lucky” resolution could save the laughing Miss Periwinkle from a taste of hospital experience, by no means jolly to itself, but of which as usual she sees nothing but the funny side.

“My dear girl, we shall have you sick in your body unless you keep yourself warm and quiet for a few days.” [Remainder of 8 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

The lively lady, we are glad to assure our readers, was not at all disconcerted by the “dismals” of her first experiment, but hopes to try her hand once more, and among the hospitals of the colored regiments.

These sketches are the best record we have yet seen of hospital experience, for while the author sees and pictures the ludicrous side of every scene, she also shows, with genuine feeling, all a woman’s sympathy for suffering, and all a woman’s tact in relieving it. There are some passages in this little volume which will move the heart to tears as irresistibly as the humor of others will move the voice to laughter.


These sketches have been widely read and admired in their newspaper form, and we are sure they will be gladly welcomed in the very tasteful volume in which they are now collected. They are from the pen of one of the raciest and most delightful of our young female authors. Miss Alcott has wit, pathos, and power as a writer, and she gives evidence of all these qualities here. Our readers have had a taste of the quality of these sketches in extracts we have previously made, and we heartily commend the book to their perusal.


We hope all our readers will purchase a copy.


In organizing our army hospitals in such a manner as to draw into them some of the most cultivated, refined and humane of women for nurses we have prepared the way for a new variety of literature which will still further open our sympathies for the sick and wounded soldiers. Of this fresh and deeply interesting kind of reading these “Hospital Sketches” are not only remarkable but memorable. Though the author’s service was brief, because of breaking down under the labor, she so felt and has so described what she saw and did, that a good influence has taken strength if not life from her touch. It is true that her characters are all heroes, and were ready to her hand; yet they were in such disguise as few penetrate, and she has not only reached their hearts but taken all restraint from their deepest and tenderest emotions.
It is thus that we have her picture of the Virginia blacksmith – for it is beyond the creative power of genius.


Miss Alcott’s “Hospital Sketches,” which, on their original appearance in the *Commonwealth* newspaper, were so warmly applauded by the press, have been published in a little volume, and are for sale at all the bookstores. The wit, the humor, the power of brief and vivid description which the volume evinces, will give it a wide popularity.


To buy the little volume of Hospital Sketches by Louisa M. Alcott will prove both a duty and a pleasure; the book is instructive, provoking and amusing, and the purchaser’s money not only defrays the cost of publication but helps the homeless orphans of the war, and is a substantial token of respect to a faithful army nurse, who gained in a Washington hospital a wealth of kindly experience, with the loss of health and her hair. The greater part of this narrative has already appeared in the columns of the Commonwealth; what is new to the public must be copied by no unscrupulous editor; it would be like robbing a charity box in the vestry of a church. Neither is it needful to speak of its direct, animated style, its cheery common sense, its wholesome bits of censure and satire, and its eye filling touches of pathos, for of all these things Miss Alcott can discourse much more effectively than we. We leave her to tell her own story to a public that knows her well and is waiting to know her better.


Roberts Brothers publish, this week, the long-promised reprint of the admired Hospital Sketches of Louisa Alcott, which were so popular when first published in the spring of 1863. They ran through the newspapers like wildfire, for we were in the midst of the war, and few such experiences had then been made public, so that everybody was interested in them. They were related, too, in such a lively and pathetic manner, just as they were written for the family circle in Concord, out of which the daughter and sister had gone to duty as a nurse at Washington, in the winter of 1862–3, – that they went to the heart of all readers, except a few who blamed them for levity. To this criticism she makes allusion in the preface to the present volume, and gives the reason of the tone which was complained of; quite a sufficient and
proper one, too. Very little change has been made in the work itself, or in the additional sketches which are here published along with it. The latter are nearly three times as much in bulk as the “Hospital Sketches,” which fill but 96 pages, while the eight “Camp and Fireside Stories” stretch to 283 pages. More than half of them relate to the war, and have more or less of Miss Alcott’s army experience woven into them; they have all been printed before, either in the Atlantic or the Commonwealth, for which, at one time, Miss Alcott was a regular contributor. Of the three “fireside stories,” one was written for the Atlantic (“The Modern Cinderella”), another, we believe, for the Saturday Evening Gazette (“Mrs Podgers’s Teapot”), and the other, which is quite as good as either—“The King of Clubs and the Queen of Hearts”—was printed in the “Monitor,” a short-lived literary paper, published in Concord in 1862. It is founded on events with which the Concord folk were familiar, and relates to that remote period when Dr Lewis first introduced his “light gymnastics” to the people of New England. Concord was one of the first villages to welcome the new system, and nearly all its people engaged in it, at least for a short time, among them Miss Alcott herself.

This volume illustrates excellently well the characteristics of Miss Alcott’s talent as a novelist. Her subjects are always portions of her own experience; her characters always the people she has known, under slight disguises, or strangely metamorphosed, as may happen, but easily to be recognized by those who have the key to them. In this she resembles many other writers; but there is a peculiar blending of this realism with extreme idealization in most of her stories. She succeeds best—indeed, she only succeeds at all—in her real pictures. Her descriptions are as faithful, and as varied in their fidelity, as life itself, so long as she restricts herself to what she has actually seen and known; beyond this, all is shadowy and a matter of luck. She may come near the fact she aims at, or she may not, when she trusts to her imagination; but when she cleaves to real experiences, she is sure of her effect; and her success is always greater in proportion to the depth of the experience she has to portray. For this reason we have always thought “Hospital Sketches” her best piece of work; it is by no means faultless, but it fastens itself upon the mind and heart of the reader with a force that makes one rank the author high among American writers. She has never had patience to form a concise and simple style, and writes as the spirit moves her. Sometimes in admirable sentences—sometimes in a very rambling and slipshod way—but always with spirit, good sense, and good feeling,—and rising sometimes into genuine humor and pathos, such as few writers ever reach. Now that she has won a deserved fame, and can choose her own time and manner of writing more than she has done heretofore, we shall expect her to prune and condense somewhat; to publish only what satisfies herself, and thus secure a permanent hold on her readers, who are now so fascinated by all that comes from her pen that they do not criticize it very closely. A brilliant and useful career is before her, and we trust she will have health, spirits and courage enough for all its requirements.

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New-York Tribune

A fascinating volume, full of pathos and beauty, and with some touches of dark
tragedy, is the collection of fugitive pieces, by Miss Louisa M. Alcott, just published by Roberts Brothers. It includes a new edition of her famous *Hospital Sketches*, with eight *Camp and Fireside Stories*, drawn in a great measure from experiences of the war and Slavery. Miss Alcott is an excellent story-teller, and her book is destined to be popular.

**Boston Daily Evening Transcript** 42.12,068 (14 August 1869): 2:1.

*Hospital Sketches*, communicated originally in letters to the Springfield Republican, we believe, were among the first efforts of Miss Alcott’s pen that won the attention of the public. Fresh, lively, descriptive, with incidents full of pathos, they were not alone prized for their vivacity of style and touching narratives; they also had influence in keeping in vigor a glowing patriotism, and fostered tender sympathy with those who endured the dangers and hardships of the fight for freedom. Roberts Brothers have, as many will be glad to know, put these “Sketches,” with several short stories, into a volume; thus reaching thousands of new and old readers. In a brief preface the author explains why she indulged in what seemed to some an occasional tone of levity, and also why she said no more of her religious experiences or religious matters when serving as nurse. This explanation, on the one part, is creditable to her common sense and knowledge of human nature; and on the other to her humility and reverent shrinking sensitiveness as to sacred things, which it would be well for such as question her piety to imitate.

**Hartford Daily Courant** 33.194 (16 August 1869): 2:3.

*The Hospital Sketches* of Miss Louisa M. Alcott were very favorably received when they were first published; and they deserved to be. They owed their popularity to no factitious accompaniments, they were not exaggerated, but very real sketches, full of bright humor and occasional wit, a wide-awake appreciation of the situation, and a sub-tone of pathos, which would now and then surprise the reader by coming to the surface and demanding its tribute. They were, besides, capitaliy written, in a style lively and clear.

Her publishers have just reprinted those Sketches in a very neat volume, together with eight other tales of fireside and camp, making a book of 379 pages. These stories lack the absorbing motive of the sketches, but they are very readable, and show the same lively humor and quick ability to seize telling points and make striking situations. The art of constructing short stories is one of the most difficult in the world, and very few have been successful in it. Miss Alcott has a skillful hand in this department. Her publishers have made up a very entertaining volume, which will be welcome.


Those who remember Miss Alcott’s pleasant *Hospital Sketches* will be glad to see
them put together in a very pretty volume with eight of her entertaining, sprightly, short stories. Among the latter are “My Contraband,” “Love and Loyalty,” “A Modern Cinderella,” “A Hospital Christmas,” and “An Hour.” The volume is very unlike her “Little Women,” but can scarcely fail of being quite as popular as that work.

Springfield Daily Union (21 August 1869): 4:5.

Those who have been charmed with the previous volumes of this talented writer, entitled “Little Women,” will be glad to welcome another volume from her pen, and if, as the critics assure us, this shall prove as attractive a volume as the preceding it will serve to enhance the reputation of the fair authoress. These hospital sketches were first published in the Commonwealth in 1863, when the writer was a hospital nurse in Washington and at once attracted attention from the piquancy of her style and the life-like coloring she threw over the scenes she described. To these has been added a number of stories, descriptive of scenes in the camp and at the fireside, written at different times since. One of the sketches taken at random will give a correct idea of the style of the author.

A few minutes later, as I came in again with fresh rollers, I saw John sitting erect, with no one to support him, while the surgeon dressed his back. [Remainder of 7 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

American Literary Gazette 13.9 (1 September 1869): 255.

The Hospital Sketches appeared some time ago, and the favor with which they were received has caused the authoress to issue another edition, attached to which is a collection of short tales of an attractive character. Miss Alcott tells us that she “makes no pretensions to literary merit,” and then proceeds to give us some of the most delightfully written tales it has ever been our good fortune to read. They are simple, but to this they owe their great charm, while the graceful elasticity of their style might serve as a model for more pretentious writers. The book is neatly printed, and the illustrations well drawn and engraved.

Zion’s Herald 46.35 (2 September 1869): 413.3.

Roberts Brothers have added two pretty books, to their youths’ library, both by bright women, both full of bright touches . . . “Hospital Sketches” is the best flower the war has yet blossomed. It is the beginning of Miss Alcott’s strength, and has never been surpassed by her. Some of the scenes are exquisitely touching. Scenes from real life, they are full of immortal life. It will be a book that will be more popular with our grandchildren than with us, for it paints one expression of the war in most vivid lines and colors. Let the Sunday-schools remember both these books.
One of the most readable books of the season, is Roberts Brothers’ edition of Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s Hospital Sketches and Camp and Fireside Stories. Very many of our readers well remember the freshness and sparkle of some of these sketches, published in 1863, and very widely copied by the newspaper press, giving glimpses of Nurse Periwinkle’s experience in one of the large hospitals during the war. With a large heart fully enlisted in the work, Miss Alcott’s letters, originally, we believe, written for the home circle, with their sad and varied experiences, yet everywhere revealing glimpses of sunshine which the heroism and courage of those scenes displayed, and lightening the picture with such rays of gladsome cheerfulness as are to be found even in the midst of so much suffering, touched and thrilled many thousand hearts all over our land.

These sketches, together with a number of stories, into which, as usual, Miss Alcott weaves somewhat of her personal experience, are fresh and interesting, charming, as do all of her works, by their lively, chatty style, while her power of description, pleasantry of thought and earnest imagination, are sure to attract and please; Miss Alcott has already established her fame as an author, and these sketches, if not as finished as some more elaborate productions, are full of tenderness and pathos, fully making up for any fault otherwise.

These “Hospital Sketches” were originally written as letters from Washington when Miss Alcott was engaged as nurse in one of the army hospitals there in the winter of 1862–3. They were printed at that time in the Boston Commonwealth, and were received with warm commendation by the public. Miss Alcott possesses the rare gift of presenting a cheerful view to even the saddest of scenes, and so these “Sketches” excite smiles as well as tears. Some have objected to these descriptions of hospital life as having a “tone of levity.” To such she says in her preface “that the wish to make the best of everything and send home cheerful reports even from that saddest of scenes, an army hospital, probably produced the impression of levity upon those who have never known the sharp contrasts of the tragic and comic in such a life. [Additional quoted sentence omitted.]”

The touching story of the brave John’s struggle and triumph cannot soon be forgotten by those who read it. The lesson, too, which Miss Alcott teaches of our Christian duties to the colored people is most timely and valuable. We quote the following scene:

But more interesting than officers, ladies, mules or pigs, were my colored brothers and sisters, because so unlike the respectable members of society I’d known in moral Boston. [Remainder of 6 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

The “Camp and Fireside Stories,” eight in number, make up the rest of the volume.
They were originally published as magazine contributions and were received with much favor. Their collection in one volume, with the “Sketches,” will afford much additional pleasure to the numerous readers of Little Women, into whose hands the book will be sure to go.

*Arthur’s Home Magazine* 34.4 (October 1869): 238.

Hospital Sketches first appeared in book form a few years since, and met with decided success. In the present edition there is added to the original work a number of “Camp and Fireside Stories” of more than ordinary interest. Any volume from the pen of Miss Alcott, the author of *Little Women*, needs no recommendation of ours to insure its success.


Hospital Sketches originally appeared in the columns of the Boston *Commonwealth*, over the signature of Tribulation Periwinkle, and are “simply a brief record of one person’s experience,” as an army hospital nurse. They are written in a pleasant, gossipy, natural style; the incidents, a judicious admixture of the “grave and gay,” the humorous and the pathetic, being alike removed from the extremes of levity and gloom.

*Camp and Fireside Stories*, though more pretentious in style and elaborate in plot, are not, in our opinion, of equal merit.


Miss Alcott, as thousands of her readers know, handles a sprightly pen. These sketches originally appeared over the signature of “Nurse Periwinkle,” written from Washington in the leisure moments of a very busy life in hospital service, and published in the *Commonwealth* in 1863. To these sketches are now added eight stories, making a very readable book.


*Hospital Sketches*, by Miss Alcott (Roberts Brothers), is a worthy companion volume of “Little Women.” These stories and sketches were originally published – with one or two exceptions – during the war – the “Hospital Sketches” in the *Boston Commonwealth*, the “Camp and Fireside Stories” in other journals. They deserve not only the reputation they then enjoyed, but this permanent preservation in book form. No more graphic pictures of those aspects of camp life which Miss Alcott depicts were evoked by the war.
The Independent 21.1092

*Hospital Sketches and Camp and Fireside Stories* are written by Miss Louisa M. Alcott, in the same fresh and natural style that characterized her “Little Women.” Those of her readers whose memories are stored with incidents of the late war of which they can boast *magna pars fui* can vouch for the truthfulness of these descriptions, from actual experience. Others can only heartily like the spirit of the book, which reads like the sternest sort of reality, and as heartily commend it to our readers.

Zion’s Herald 47.15
(14 April 1870): 173:2.

*Hospital Sketches*, by Louisa Alcott (Roberts Bros.), is the first and best of Miss Alcott’s books. Written in and of the war, full of pathos, wit, and fire, it has now, and will retain the first place among the memorabilia of these times.

Excerpt from “For Summer Reading! Miss Alcott’s Books Given Away!” *The Commonwealth* 8.36
(7 May 1870): [2]:3.

We need not say Miss Alcott stands confessedly at the head of all writers who have portrayed young life as known in New England, and the great humanities which come from intelligence and love of country. These books [also *Little Women* and *An Old-Fashioned Girl*] are models of their kind, and without rival in their specialties. Their unbounded popularity warrant their acceptance by old and young alike.

Philadelphia Inquirer.

Miss Alcott performed a brief tour of hospital duty during the late war. Her career as nurse was terminated by an attack of dangerous illness. But she made good use of her time, and her sketches of hospital life, if briefer than could be wished, make up in quality what they lack in quantity. They are, indeed, the most graphic and natural pictures of life in the great army hospitals that have yet appeared. Free from all affected sentimentalism, they blend in a strange and piquant manner the grave and gay, the lively and severe.


It is a book which is thoroughly enjoyable, and with which little fault need be found.
It is not a pretentious work, and the author has only aimed at telling the story of her experience as an army hospital nurse, in an easy, natural style; but the incidents which she has given us are so varied, – sometimes amusingly humorous and sometimes tenderly pathetic, – and her narrative is so simple and straightforward and truthful, that the reader’s attention is chained, and he finds it impossible to resist the charm of the pleasant, kindly, keen-sighted Nurse Perriwinkle.


Such is the title of a volume by Miss Louisa M. Alcott, author of ‘Little Women,’ one of the most charming productions of the day. Miss Alcott is a New England woman of the best type, – gifted, refined, progressive in her opinions, heroic, self-sacrificing. She devoted her time and means to the service of her country in the darkest days of the Rebellion, visiting the camp and the hospital, devoting herself to the care of the sick and the dying, braving danger and privation in the sacred cause of humanity. The results of her experience are embodied in these ‘Sketches,’ which are graphic in narrative, rich in incident, and dramatic in style. Miss Alcott has a keen sense of the ludicrous, and, while she does not trifle with her subject, seeks to amuse as well as instruct her reader. She has the sunniest of tempers, and sees a humorous side even to the sad life of the hospital.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices


_Boston Daily Advertiser_ 114.35 (11 August 1869): [1]:2.


_Eclectic Magazine_ n.s. 10.4 (October 1869): 505.

_Putnam’s Magazine_ 4.23 (November 1869): 642.

_The Spectator_ (11 June 1870). Notices _Camp and Fireside Stories_.

20
**Boston Post 64.25**  

This is a capital story. Four men are on duty, and while there their thoughts are of home, and each entertains the other with his method of getting his wife. Miss Alcott writes these short stories well.

**Daily Evening Traveller**  
[Boston] 19.256  

Like all Miss Alcott’s writings, these stories are thoroughly readable.

**Taunton Daily Gazette 21.26**  
(30 January 1864): 2:2.

Whatever Miss Alcott writes has a freshness and a fulness of reality that are quite charming and peculiar. “On Picket Duty” is as naturally and touchingly related as are the “Hospital Sketches” – a work in which simple truth is made powerful for good, and intensely affecting, by the gift of genius.
Moods (1865; Revised Edition, 1882)
Our readers have not forgotten Louisa M. Alcott, whose piquant “Hospital Sketches,” gathered from the journals of the day, formed an interesting and instructive book. These sketches were not only rich in personal experience and patriotic feeling, but displayed considerable literary ability, which has since produced a novel with the brief title of Moods. This novel, otherwise of a fair degree of merit, is chiefly remarkable as propounding a theory with regard to marriage which appears to be gaining ground; according to the new philosophy, marriage is an experiment; if the love that drew the parties together does not prove genuine and lasting, separation is the natural and appropriate remedy. It will be remembered that in the “New Atmosphere” by Gail Hamilton, this idea is advanced and defended. Now we do not question the sincerity of these maiden reformers, who, knowing nothing of marriage by experience, are eager in defense of a fancied remedy for acknowledged social evils. But we regard them as mistaken none the less. They are prone to forget that every human connection has its drawbacks and disqualifications, that there is no such thing in life as a perfect union between man and woman and that the delightful interblending of the souls of lovers must always give place on closer acquaintance to the mutual recognition of imperfect sympathies and defects that call for candor and forbearance. The knowledge that the step is irrevocable acts in two ways, by making the unmarried cautious and thoughtful in their choice, and by checking the rash and impatient rupture of ties already formed. Much of the richest experience, of the most valuable discipline of life, is to be found in the loyalty, candor and patience by which two partially discordant natures are attuned to ultimate harmony. In almost all cases the wedded pair are farther apart than they suppose, and can only approach by slow and perhaps painful steps. Doubtless the parties to what have at length proved among the happiest marriages, have in many cases during the early years of wedlock been startled by at least one apparition of the terrible doubt lest the union upon which they had risked their happiness should prove a lamentable mistake. If in that dark hour they had seen before them an open door, how many would have passed through it to the more pitiable mistake beyond. In Miss Alcott’s novel Sylvia should never have married Geoffrey, but when she had done so the conduct of Adam was inexcusable in continuing his presence and attentions. When at length she saw clearly that she loved him far more than her husband, her confidante pains her by pointing out to her that even the marriage she would now choose would be a mistake. Adam loves her no better than Geoffrey, and is less fitted to make her happy.

“In him the head rules, in Geoffrey the heart.” [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

The result is that the poor young woman loses both her lovers, and dies soon after, which was all that was left for her to do. But we would not advise those who are not sure of dying at the right time to follow her example. Such a course would hardly tend to diminish the number of those whom the authoress thus describes:

“That sad sisterhood called disappointed women; a larger class than
many dream it to be, though there are few of us who have not seen members of it.” [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]


Miss Alcott’s *Moods* differs from the novels just named [Under the Ban, The Perpetual Curate], in that it has no theological aspect whatever, but deals with life and morals directly, after the manner of German novels of Goethe’s and Richter’s day. In its plot it is not unlike the “Elective Affinities,” while in its abrupt and ideal mode of treatment and its great lack of artistic form, it reminds one more of Richter. Of course, we do not mean to compare Miss Alcott with either of these writers, but only to suggest the school of thought to which her work belongs. It should be more fitly compared with a recent novel noticed in these columns – *Emily Chester*. The similarity of the plot and some of the characters is obvious, while it is impossible for either of the writers to have borrowed from the other. In fact, we understand that Miss Alcott’s book has been written for several years, and our readers will find that a part of it has already been printed in *The Commonwealth*. It is her most serious venture in the field of fiction, and we are glad to learn that it is so favorably received by the public.

It has, indeed, many claims to the popular attention. It deals with the absorbing question of affinities, and that so nearly connected with it – of ungenial marriages, and it does so in a manner which cannot shock the moral sense, while it piques the curiosity and awakens sympathy. The heroine, Sylvia, is one of those impulsive beings whose worst faults fall immediately upon themselves; and the story of her love and fate, so natural, and yet so unreal, will excite the hearts of those who read, even if it somewhat perplexes their understandings. The other characters, are, for the most part, only sketches; but the heroine’s sister, Prudence, is, from first to last, a well-sustained part, of much humor and fidelity to nature.

So, in a less degree, is Ottila, the Spanish enchantress, who by her charms becomes the evil genius of the hero, Warwick. But neither Mark nor Geoffrey have much identity, and the hero himself, though sketched in a noble manner, is not always consistent or impressive.

A want of consistency and definite outline is perhaps to be noticed throughout the book, and often makes an additional charm. Certainly no one from the beginning, or the middle of the story, could anticipate the close, and though tragic enough in its main current, it abounds with eddies of humor. In this respect it is superior to *Emily Chester*, which is monotonous in its steady pursuit of one idea throughout. Miss Alcott is evidently a writer of quick fancy, lively wit, and clear observation. She is somewhat distracted by these gifts, and has not learned to hold her subject in that steady grasp which a far duller author often has.

Nothing could be more artless than both the novels which we are comparing. An intense desire to exhibit the subject as it lies in the author’s mind is plain in both, but it is forgotten that the true artist’s work is to represent, not to exhort; to suggest rather than to insist. There is far too much moralizing in both; in *Emily Chester* it is more conventional, in *Moods* more ideal, but it is very likely to provoke to dissent rather than conviction in both.
The spirit and design of *Moods* are lofty, the execution unequal. It has not the intense vitality of *Hospital Sketches*, but with all its force and humor seems a little unreal, as we have said.

**American Literary Gazette**
4.6 (16 January 1865): 168.

The aim of the author may be inferred from the fact that she takes for her keynote Emerson’s saying that “life is a train of moods, like a string of beads.” It has been her purpose to depict some of these changeful moods of head and heart, and she does it with a graphic pen.


This is a short story of great power and absorbing interest by a new writer, whose *Hospital Sketches* were remarkable for a humor and insight which ought to have made them much more widely known. In the present tale the conflict of passion in noble characters is drawn with great delicacy and skill, and with a freedom and firmness which promise remarkable works hereafter. “Moods” is neither sentimental nor morbid nor extravagant. It has freshness and self-reliance. Greater experience and resolute study will correct the imperfect literary art; nor is it a disheartening failure not to have succeeded in a satisfactory discrimination between the two heroes of the tale. Such likeness in unlikeness demands a Shakespearian subtlety of skill fully to delineate. It is something to have suggested it. After Hawthorne we recall no American love-story of equal power.

**Taunton Daily Gazette**

The course which it was the main object of the author of “Moods” to map out cannot be completely done by any one who has not made the voyage, and with all that watchfulness which its utmost perils awaken, and all that emotion which a fervid nature is capable of feeling and expressing over its extremest scenes of disgust or of rapture. Besides, as none of the great masters of our tongue have seen fit to evoke such hymeneal experiences as this writer delineates from the realms of silence, we have no language wherewith to truly and yet decently clothe them. Still Miss Alcott has feelingly laid open the chief cause which makes many a modern married life wearisome, if not loathsome; and has analyzed it courageously though by no means exhaustively. As a story of disappointed affection, it moves on naturally, yet not in a way to make us deeply sympathize with the heroine; for she is one of those virgins who awaken too late. We may pity, but we cannot admire her; for, though she was conscious that she had touched the only hand which could lead her into paradise, she too easily yielded to another’s guidance and wandered wide to look back with sighs and forward with sorrow. Such a tale can only end sadly or shamefully. Now one of these methods of bringing on the catastrophe will generally disappoint; and whether it be for the reason that it is unnatural, or
because it does not seem a sufficient retri-
bution for a sordid match, or one in any
way wanting in pure and passionate love,
those who choose to unveil the resulting
domestic dulness or desolation would do
d well to critically consider. In fine, a novel
should end happily or tragically; and not
so dismal as to be relieved only with the
dim hope of a more blissful union in that
world whereof it is written, They neither
marry nor are given in marriage. Never-
theless the book will well repay attentive
reading; for there is scarcely a page which
has not something of that freshness of ob-
servation, and felicity of expression, which
make her “Hospital Sketches” so nearly
incomparable with anything of their kind.

Too much cannot be written to warn
young people from a false step in this mat-
ter; and this topic furnishes a legitimate
expression for the predominating state of
feeling among our young female writers.
But while they warn the unmarried against
this false step in life, why do they forget
to show that the only path for those who
have already taken it, is a path of duty
and self abnegation? Where is the religious
experience and firm faith of the writers
of “Emily Chester” and “Moods?” It has
been said that the nineteenth century was
one of opinions merely, and not of convi-
cions [convictions]. We shall be forced to
believe it, if many more books like these
are written.

“Moods” has more of the right spirit
on this point [religious self-control] than
Emily Chester. But even there sufficient
stress is not laid upon it. The grand mis-
take of both books is in supposing that
we can love but one, and can be happy in
the marriage relation with none other; that
attractions and repulsions cannot be con-
quered by will; that mind does not rule
over matter. Any woman with a proper
sense of duty, praying prayers of faith to
heaven for aid, recognizing the noblest
qualities in her husband, can always con-
querr. There is no reason whatever why she
should not.

“Moods” has been called a healthier
book than “Emily Chester.” It doubtless
is, but it has far less power, and as a work
of genius is inferior to it . . .

Those of our young people, who have
a tendency for metaphysics, have long
worshipped that wonder book of Miss
Shepard’s “Counterparts” and so receive
with strong prejudices in its favor such a
book as “Emily Chester.” But “Moods”
has little of that power. The escape-value
for the surplus life of Miss Alcott is evi-
dently not in magnetic power, it seems to
be, like Mrs. Stowe’s, the description of

X. Boston Evening
Transcript 37.10,661
(21 January 1865): [1]:5.

This is a book which will have many
readers as the companion work to Emily
Chester, to which, however, it is greatly
inferior. Both books are expressive of the
state of feeling among the women of Amer-
ica. The progress of thought during the
last fifty years reached a climax in tran-
scendentalism, and since then has passed
through many reactions. The ultra spirit
which possesses the reformer of our day,
and which shows itself in the speculative
theories rife among us, the eagerness to
know the source of the mysterious influ-
ence of mind on mind, and the laws which
govern its action – this spirit finds fewer
outlets among women than among men,
yet possesses them none the less.

The one great evil which American love
of wealth and position has brought upon
them is unhappy marriages . . .
natural economy, and the embodiment of healthy human character. This might suit an artistic taste, but few among us are artists. For unreflective minds the “Moods” is deficient in interest; to minds just beginning to reflect, and fed on such books as “Counterparts,” it is relatively weak. Minds with morbid tendencies will constitute its chief readers; but they will go away dissatisfied. Strong, healthy minds will find little which is attractive in it, and they also will be dissatisfied. Yet the book is far from being a failure; it has its value and it lies in the fact that it is a new landmark; it shows the progress of thought and feeling among our young people. It proves them to be just now suffering under a reaction, but still earnest, thoughtful, and seeking after truth, though a little too eager to promulgate it.


One of the foolish novels. A story about married life, written evidently by one who knows nothing about it.


In this book the facile pen of the author of “Hospital Sketches” will be readily recognized. Her readers renew their admiration of the sprightly humor which has just given them such a “grapper and grammer,” such a golden-wedding feast, such a Prue. Nor do they bring a lesser appreciation to the quieter scenes of the book, like that, for instance, of the water-journey, when they sailed along with Sylvia in narrative flowing and musical as the river itself.

But Miss Alcott does not choose to be always only graceful or humorous. A great moral problem lies unsolved, and she comes to the discussion of it in a tragic mask. Without attempting a sketch of the story, it may be well to state that this problem is one of which it is the fashion to write a great deal nowadays – a question in matrimonial metaphysics. It might perhaps be called: the difference between conjugal and platonic love. The illustration in “Moods” is that of a young and inexperienced girl marrying, under sufficiently aggravated circumstances, her friend instead of her lover, and discovering her error afterwards; in which predicament, she decides that the only sinless course is to live as wife to neither.

In this sorrowful guise, we lose sight of our old entertainer. A new voice takes up the story – earnest, indeed, but scarcely so attractive as the one we were familiar with. It was a sensible artist who criticised Mark’s pictures – preferring the simple scene of the “Golden Wedding” to the more highly-wrought “Clytemnestra.” It was likewise sensible in Mr. Yule to warn his son, that “the work which warms the heart is greater than that which freezes the blood.”

Novelists can win applause just so long as they “hold the mirror up to nature;” but a made story – a case manufactured to meet a point – no matter how ingenious it may be, always fails to appeal to the popular heart. The plot of “Moods” is open to the suspicion of having come to maturity under a bell-glass.

To read the light literature of the present day, one must wonder at the taste for horrors which seems to possess the people. Is it not strange, when our country
is full of suffering the most terribly real, that any one should have any superfluity of sympathy to waste on the elaborate agony of these self-analyzing, self-tormenting heroines? Our lady-writers especially seem to revel in the portrayal of all sorts of mental misery, just as some of the old artists delighted to paint a man roasting on a grid-iron, or breaking on the rack. *Cui bono?* To make young girls pick themselves to pieces – finger all their sensations – that they may distinguish the difference between esteem and passion? and, when they have found it, to instruct them that they may marry where the first sentiment is undefined, but *never* where the latter is?

All book-characters have had their imitators, from the fragile Amanda Fitz-Allen down to Emily Chesters and Sylvia Yules. (What an inundation of Rochesters have we had from all the small-writers ever since *Jane Eyre* was published!) There are some women who are not quite happy unless they are a little miserable. Who could not pick out a dozen such from his acquaintance – sensitive, impressible, morbidly-conscientious beings, with a feeble physique and an unconquerable turn for martyrdom? Said an old woman once: “I've had no great troubles; but, thank God! I've made my small ones go as far as most people do their big!”

Let our gifted young novel-wrights remember these things when it lies in their power to set the fashion so easily. Now we are forced to turn back for relief to the cheerful philosophy of Miss Jane Austen’s stories. There we read without being shocked that Marianne forgot her passion for Willoughby, and became the sincere wife of her “friend” Col. Brandon; that Emma Woodhouse could meet Mr. Churchill after her marriage with a man whom she had certainly *only* esteemed for years, without being once tempted to forswear allegiance to her husband. Miss Austen was a temperate reasoner, and never insisted that marriages were made in heaven, unless it might be in that kingdom of heaven which is within us – a pure heart and a quiet judgment.

The *morale* of Miss Alcott’s story has suggested so much that seemed desirable to be said, that we have left ourselves little space for that praise which could so warmly be given to the heartiness and carefulness with which the work has been executed. We shall look with interest for further productions from the same pen, confident that they will display even more unmistakably the handsome ability of the author.

“Transcendental Fiction.”

Miss Alcott, hitherto known to the readers of American books as the writer of a series of spirited sketches drawn from her own experiences in a military hospital at Washington, has in this volume made her first appearance as a writer of fiction. The work has attracted considerable attention in her own country, and passed through several editions. It may be classified as belonging to the transcendental school of novels, and bears upon its title-page the following sentence from Emerson: ‘Life is a train of moods like a string of beads; . . . [remainder of sentence omitted].’ It is, however, the work of an original and somewhat daring mind. Of speculations which find their type in Goethe’s ‘Elective Affinities’ there are few representatives in English fiction. Our writers, being reluctant to enter upon paths which lead over stone walls and through swamps to doubtful lands, have contented themselves with
portraying and analysing the characters formed amid the trials and passions generated by the imperfect but disciplinary conditions of society and its institutions. Miss Alcott boldly grapples with the institutions themselves; and though she cannot be denied a partial success, it must be confessed that she faints at last, and leaves society with its old frontiers.

It is an old battle-field on which the encounter occurs – a false marriage. In Sylvia Yule, the youngest child of a loveless marriage, are

Mysteriously blended the two natures that had given her life, although she was born when the gulf between regretful husband and sad wife was widest. [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

With a father (the mother had died at Sylvia’s birth) who, ‘having said one fatal “No” to himself, made it the satisfaction of his life to say a never-varying “Yes” to his children;’ a brother, who is an artist, and who, though tenderly attached to his youngest sister, is often absent; a prosaic sister, absorbed in household duties, whose relation to her younger sister is described by the brother when he says, ‘Sylvia trims the house with flowers, but Prudence dogs her with a dustpan’ – this young Mignon-like creature, so full of exceptional traits and moods, was

Solitary even in this social-seeming home. [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

At the same time she is eccentric, even to the extent of running about her flower-garden dressed in a suit of boy’s clothing, and choosing as her pets the more desolate and ugly creatures, as a caterpillar or fieldmouse. Sylvia is little more than a child when she meets the two young men with whom her destiny is bound up, Geoffrey Moor and Adam Warwick. They have been friends at college; since then Moor has passed his time in Europe, and Warwick in Cuba. In Cuba, Warwick has formed a hasty engagement of marriage with a fascinating woman, of which he deeply repents, but can only obtain her consent to the test which a year’s absence may give to her feelings towards him, and, with a vow to return at the end of the year, leaves Cuba to become the guest of his old friend Moor, who lives upon his inherited estate, close to Mr. Yule’s residence. The young men are also the friends of Sylvia’s brother Mark, and upon one occasion they arrange an expedition into the country of several days, the adventurous Sylvia being permitted to go with them. The descriptions of nature – human and other – which are made to attend upon this little river voyage sufficiently attest the character of the writer. On their little bark Kelpie

They went floating under vernal arches, where a murmurous rustle seemed to whisper, ‘Stay!’ along shadowless sweeps, where the blue turned to gold and dazzled with its unsteady shimmer; ... [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

It is not wonderful that these personages should be wafted into the region of tender emotions. Moor and Warwick cannot resist the charms of their fair companion. Warwick knows that if he shall remain near Sylvia, Moor’s hope will be ruined; and, believing that Sylvia does not yet consciously love him, resolves to sacrifice his own love to that of his friend. He then goes off to fulfil his vow of meeting again the Cuban beauty, whom, however, he has resolved never to marry; at length, however, she is kind enough to marry another.

Warwick subsequently learns that Sylvia has declined an offer from Moor, and resolves to return and make his love known. But, meanwhile, Sylvia has learned of Warwick’s engagement with the Cuban lady, and hearing that the latter is married, supposes that it is to
Warwick. The love that Warwick supposed unaroused has long been awake, and she has been expecting his return; but now, when she believes he is married, she becomes weak and weary, and is easily persuaded to marry Moor, who is entirely unaware of any attachment between her and Warwick. The wedding of Moor with Sylvia is followed by an excursion among the mountains. On one occasion, when Sylvia has separated from the rest of the party, Warwick meets her. He has not heard of her marriage, and pours forth his protestations of love. Sylvia, overwhelmed with grief, finds that her love for Warwick is unconquerable. There is a tragical parting. But when the wedding party has returned home, Warwick, with a judicious friend – Faith Dane by name – visits the Moors, and they accept an invitation to remain some days. It is evident to him that Sylvia’s marriage is a loveless one, and that, despite Geoffrey Moor’s devotion to her, she is unhappy. On a certain evening at Moor’s house the company fall to discussing the best method of retrieving a false marriage, apropos of the recent occurrence of the elopement of a wife in the neighbourhood. Sylvia has ventured some ejaculation of pity for the woman, which has much shocked her sister Prue, who appeals to Warwick on the general subject. The brief conversation which follows is of such importance to the author and to the story, that we quote the material portion of it. It is Warwick that speaks first: –

‘I would begin at the beginning, and teach young people that marriage is not the only aim and end of life,’... 
[Remainder of 4 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

We give the summing up of Faith’s view: –

‘Let us suppose that Helen was a woman possessed of a stronger character, a deeper nature; the husband a younger, nobler man; the lover truly excellent, and above even counselling the step this pair have taken.’

[Remainder of 3 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

The author is, however, not prepared to have her characters put into practice these theories, which really constitute the moral aim of the book. Sylvia confesses her love for Warwick, but when she has separated from her husband, agrees with her lover upon a renunciation. This renunciation, however, rests not at all upon the fact of the previous marriage, but upon some formidable transcendental ideas urged by Miss Dane, concerning a natural incongruity of both Sylvia and Warwick for marriage. We think we recognize in this Miss Dane, beneath all her philosophy, a New-World edition of our very potent friend, Mrs. Grundy. Moor starts for Europe, and Warwick joins him. They remain devoted friends to the last. Warwick fights well in a battle, and receives the praise of Garibaldi. Moor receives a call to come home from his wife, and, believing that she has learned to love him, starts with Warwick for America. When in sight of the shore, Warwick, in saving his friend’s life, after the ship has sunk, loses his own. Moor returns home only to be the friend of his wife in her father’s house for the few months of life left to her.

Whilst we cannot discover from this volume that the New World has anything to add in the way of solving the sad problems with which it deals, we acknowledge the benefit of having our problems themselves stated so bravely and chastely. The right putting of a question is the most important step towards obtaining the right answering of it. ‘The world’s great bridals,’ of which Tennyson sings, and the nobler race to spring from them, are not yet so near that we can fail to heed any earnest
voice that would prepare their way; for we
know that great ultimate steps cannot be
taken except as the summing up of many
intervening ones. As Browning has said –

God has conceded two sights to a
man –
One, of men’s whole work, time’s
completed plan;
The other, of the minute’s work, man’s
first
Step to the plan’s completeness.

With reference to the question of di-
 vorce, in itself, nothing is intimated in the
volume which would help us on the pos-
itive side. No one can think that there
is any gain to virtue or to society in
having two persons remain in the clos-
est relation who have no real attraction
but the iron rivets of law. But the hos-
tility of society to divorce is a part of
that general economy of nature which in-
sists that the paramount care shall go for
the protection and development of the
fruit. Severe divorce laws are the thorny
burrs that are meant to protect the child,
and preserve a home and training for it. If
it were not for children, divorce laws and
social customs would be sufficiently facile
for all cases. But no philosopher has yet
presented a new marriage theory that in-
cluded a sufficient protection to the child.
Until this is done marriage will remain, as
it is now, the most fortified of human in-
stitutions. Marriage, so far from being as-
sailed in the volume before us, is invested
with the utmost sanctity.

A rich vein of humour pervades this
book. There is a description of a Golden
Wedding in a farm-house of New England
that has a subtlety of humour and wit
not unworthy of Charles Lamb, alternat-
ing with passages of pathos and true feel-
ing which warrant the largest hope from
the author. The work as a whole lacks the
completeness of its separate scenes. Proba-
bility – as in a certain somnambulistic ad-
venture of Sylvia’s – is sometimes strained;
and there are a few other things which
may be attributable to the first effort at
a sustained work of fiction, and require
rather to be pointed out than to be severely
criticised. These defects are, however, very
slight in the presence of a story of such
thrilling and varied interest, written in a
style so graphic and simple.

[James, Henry]. “Moods.”
North American Review
101.208 (July 1865):
276–81.

Under the above title, Miss Alcott has
given us her version of the old story of
the husband, the wife, and the lover. This
story has been told so often that an au-
thor’s only pretext for telling it again is his
consciousness of an ability to make it ei-
ther more entertaining or more instructive;
to invest it with incidents more dramatic,
or with a more pointed moral. Its inter-
est has already been carried to the furthest
limits, both of tragedy and comedy, by a
number of practised French writers: under
this head, therefore, competition would be
superfluous. Has Miss Alcott proposed to
herself to give her story a philosophical
bearing? We can hardly suppose it.

We have seen it asserted that her book
claims to deal with the “doctrine of affini-
ties.” What the doctrine of affinities is, we
do not exactly know; but we are inclined to
think that our author has been somewhat
malignated. Her book is, to our perception,
innocent of any doctrine whatever.

The heroine of “Moods” is a fitful,
wayward, and withal most amiable young
person, named Sylvia. We regret to say that
Miss Alcott takes her up in her childhood.
We are utterly weary of stories about precocious little girls. In the first place, they are in themselves disagreeable and unprofitable objects of study; and in the second, they are always the precursors of a not less unprofitable middle-aged lover. We admit that, even to the middle-aged, Sylvia must have been a most engaging little person. One of her means of fascination is to disguise herself as a boy and work in the garden with a hoe and wheelbarrow; under which circumstances she is clandestinely watched by one of the heroes, who then and there falls in love with her. Then she goes off on a camping-out expedition of a week’s duration, in company with three gentlemen, with no superfluous luggage, as far as we can ascertain, but a cockle-shell stuck “pilgrim-wise” in her hat. It is hard to say whether the impropriety of this proceeding is the greater or the less from the fact of her extreme youth. This fact is at any rate kindly overlooked by two of her companions, who become desperately enamored of her before the week is out. These two gentlemen are Miss Alcott’s heroes. One of them, Mr. Geoffrey Moor, is unobjectionable enough; we shall have something to say of him hereafter: but the other, Mr. Adam Warwick, is one of our oldest and most inveterate foes. He is the inevitable *cavaliere servente* of the precocious little girl; the laconical, satirical, dogmatical lover, of about thirty-five, with the “brown mane,” the quiet smile, the “masterful soul,” and the “commanding eye.” Do not all novel-readers remember a figure, a hundred figures, analogous to this? Can they not, one of his properties being given, – the “quiet smile” for instance, – reconstruct the whole monstrous shape? When the “quiet smile” is suggested, we know what is coming: we foresee the cynical bachelor or widower, the amateur of human nature, “Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,” who has travelled all over the world, lives on a mysterious patrimony, and spends his time in breaking the hearts and the wills of demure little school-girls, who answer him with “Yes, sir,” and “No, sir.”

Mr. Warwick is plainly a great favorite with the author. She has for him that affection which writers entertain, not for those figures whom they have well known, but for such as they have much pondered. Miss Alcott has probably mused upon Warwick so long and so lovingly that she has lost all sense of his proportions. There is a most discouraging good-will in the manner in which lady novelists elaborate their impossible heroes. There are, thank Heaven, no such men at large in society. We speak thus devoutly, not because Warwick is a vicious person, – on the contrary, he exhibits the sternest integrity; but because, apparently as a natural result of being thoroughly conscientious, he is essentially disagreeable. Women appear to delight in the conception of men who shall be insupportable to men. Warwick is intended to be a profoundly serious person. A species of prologue is prefixed to the tale, in which we are initiated into his passion for one Ottila, a beautiful Cuban lady. This chapter is a literary curiosity. The relations of the two lovers are illustrated by means of a dialogue between them. Considering how bad this dialogue is, it is really very good. We mean that, considering what nonsense the lovers are made to talk, their conversation is quite dramatic. We are not certain of the extent to which the author sympathizes with her hero; but we are pretty sure that she has a secret “Bravo” in store for him upon his exit. He talks to his mistress as no sane man ever talked to a woman. It is not too much to say that he talks like a brute. Ottila’s great crime has been, that, after three months’ wooing, he has not found her so excellent a person as he at first supposed her to be. This is a specimen of his language. “You allured my eye with loveliness, my ear with music; piqued curiosity,
pampered pride, and subdued will by flat-
terries subtly administered. [2 sentences
omitted.]” What return does she get for
the sacrifice, if sacrifice it was? To have
her favors thrown back in her teeth on the
day that her lover determines to jilt her.
To jilt a woman in an underhand fashion
is bad enough; but to break your word to
her and at the same time load her with
outrage, to call her evil names because she
is so provokingly in the right, to add the
foulest insult to the bitterest injury, – these
things may be worthy of a dissolute adven-
turer, but they are certainly not worthy of
a model hero. Warwick tells Ottila that he
is “a man untamed by any law but that of
[his] own will.” He is further described as
“violently virtuous, a masterful soul, bent
on living out his aspirations at any cost”;
and as possessed of “great nobility of char-
acter, great audacity of mind”; as being
“too fierce an iconoclast to suit the old
party, too individual a reformer to join the
new,” and “a grand man in the rough, an
excellent tonic for those who have courage
to try him.” Truly, for her courage in trying
him, poor Ottila is generously rewarded.
His attitude towards her may be reduced
to this: – Three months ago, I fell in love
with your beauty, your grace, your wit. I
took them as a promise of a moral eleva-
tion which I now find you do not possess.
And yet, the deus [deuce] take it, I am
engaged to you. Ergo, you are false, im-
modest, and lacking in the “moral senti-
ment,” and I will have nothing to do with
you. I may be a sneak, a coward, a brute;
but at all events, I am untamed by any
law, etc.

Before the picnic above mentioned is
over, Warwick and Moor have, unknown
to each other, both lost their hearts to
Sylvia. Warwick may not declare him-
self, inasmuch as, to do him justice, he
considers himself bound by word to the
unfortunate beauty of the Havana. But
Moor, who is free to do as he pleases,
forthwith offers himself. He is refused,
the young girl having a preference for
Warwick. But while she is waiting for
Warwick’s declaration, his flirtation with
Ottila comes to her knowledge. She recalls
Moor, marries him, and goes to spend her
honeymoon among the White Mountains.
Here Warwick turns up. He has been ab-
sent in Cuba, whether taking back his rude
speeches to Ottila, or following them up
with more of the same sort, we are not in-
formed. He is accordingly ignorant of the
change in his mistress’s circumstances. He
finds her alone on the mountain-side, and
straightway unburdens his heart. Here en-
sues a very pretty scene, prettily told. On
learning the sad truth, Warwick takes him-
self over, off the crest of the hill, looking
very tall and grand against the sun, and
leaving his mistress alone in the shadow.
In the shadow she passes the rest of her
brief existence. She might have lived along
happily enough, we conceive, masquerad-
ing with her gentle husband in the fash-
ion of old days, if Warwick had not come
back, and proffered a visit, – his one nat-
ural and his one naughty act. Of course
it is all up with Sylvia. An honest man
in Warwick’s position would immediately
have withdrawn, on seeing that his pres-
ence only served seriously to alienate his
mistress from her husband. A dishonest
man would have remained and made love
to his friend’s wife.

Miss Alcott tries to persuade us that
her hero does neither; but we maintain
that he adopts the latter course, and,
what is worse, does it like an arrant hyp-
ocrite. He proceeds to lay down the law
of matrimonial duty to Sylvia in a man-
ner which, in our opinion, would war-
rant her in calling in her husband to turn
him out of the house. He declares, indeed,
that he designs no “French sentiment nor
sin,” whatever these may be; but he ex-
erts the utmost power of his “masterful
soul” to bully her into a protest against
her unnatural union. No man with any sense of decency, no man of the slightest common-sense, would presume to dogmatize in this conceited fashion upon a matter with which he has not the least concern. Miss Alcott would tell us, we presume, that it is not as a lover, but as a friend, that Warwick offers the advice here put into his mouth. Family friends, when they know what they are about, are only too glad to shirk the responsibility of an opinion in matrimonial differences. When a man beats, starves, or otherwise misuses his wife, any judicious acquaintance will take the responsibility of advising the poor woman to seek legal redress; and he need not, to use Miss Alcott’s own proposition, have an affinity “for” her, to do so. But it is inconceivable that a wise and virtuous gentleman should deliberately persuade two dear friends—dear equally to himself and to each other—to pick imperceptible flaws in a relation whose inviolability is the great interest of their lives, and which, from the picture presented to us, is certainly one of exceptional comfort and harmony.

In all this matter it strikes us that Sylvia’s husband is the only one to be pitied. His wife, while in a somnambulistic state, confesses the secret of her illicit affection. Moor is, of course, bitterly outraged, and his anger is well described. Sylvia pities him intensely, but insists with sweet inflexibility that she cannot continue to be his wife, and dismisses him to Europe, with a most audacious speech about the beautiful eternity and the immortality of love. Moor, who for a moment has evinced a gleam of natural passion, which does something towards redeeming from ludicrous unreality the united efforts of the trio before us, soon recovers himself, and submits to his fate precisely like a morbidly conscientious young girl who is engaged in the formation of her character under the direction of her clergyman. From this point accordingly the story becomes more and more unnatural, although, we cheerfully add, it becomes considerably more dramatic, and is much better told. All this portion is, in fact, very pretty; indeed, if it were not so essentially false, we should call it very fine. As it is, we can only use the expression in its ironical sense. Moor consents to sacrifice himself to the beautiful ethical abstraction which his wife and her lover have concocted between them. He will go to Europe and await the dawning of some new abstraction, under whose starry influence he may return. When he does return, it will not be, we may be sure, to give his wife the thorough rating she deserves.

At the eleventh hour, when the vessel is about to start, Warwick turns up, and thrusts himself, as a travelling companion, upon the man he has outraged. As Warwick was destined to die a violent death, we think Miss Alcott might have here appropriately closed her book by making Moor pitch Adam into the water for his impertinence. But as usual, Warwick has his own way.

During their absence, Sylvia sinks into a rapid decline. After a certain interval they start homeward. But their ship is wrecked; Warwick is lost in trying to save Moor’s life; and Moor reaches home alone. Sylvia then proceeds to put him and every one else in the wrong by dying the death of the righteous.

The two most striking facts with regard to “Moods” are the author’s ignorance of human nature, and her self-confidence in spite of this ignorance. Miss Alcott doubtless knows men and women well enough to deal successfully with their every-day virtues and temptations, but not well enough to handle great dramatic passions. The consequence is, that her play is not a real play, nor her actors real actors.

But beside these facts are others, less salient perhaps, upon which it is pleasanter to touch. Chief among these is the
author’s decided cleverness; that quality to which we owe it that, in spite of the absurdities of the action, the last half of her book is replete with beauty and vigor. What shall we call this quality? Imagination does not seem to us too grand a word. For, in the absence of knowledge, our authoress has derived her figures, as the German derived his camel, from the depths of her moral consciousness. If they are on this account the less real, they are also on this account the more unmistakably instinct with a certain beauty and grace. If Miss Alcott’s experience of human nature has been small, as we should suppose, her admiration for it is nevertheless great. Putting aside Adam’s treatment of Ottila, she sympathizes throughout her book with none but great things. She has the rare merit, accordingly, of being very seldom puerile. For inanimate nature, too, she has a genuine love, together with a very pretty way of describing it. With these qualities there is no reason why Miss Alcott should not write a very good novel, provided she will be satisfied to describe only that which she has seen. When such a novel comes, as we doubt not it eventually will, we shall be among the first to welcome it. With the exception of two or three celebrated names, we know not, indeed, to whom, in this country, unless to Miss Alcott, we are to look for a novel above the average.

We are glad to see a new edition of Moods, by Miss Louisa M. Alcott. It was her first novel, but it did not get fair treatment. There were too many willing sponsors for its existence, and they began to suggest changes here and eliminations there, till the poor girl was almost distracted, and sent her manuscript to press with her bantling sadly disfigured from its original trim and complete condition. Now that the author has become famous she takes and restores this her first offspring to the fair proportions originally designed for her – the earlier Mrs. Grundys, with their obtrusive advice, to the contrary notwithstanding. There is almost a tender interest in the closing paragraph to the preface: “Hoping that the young people will accept the amendment, and the elders will sympathize with the maternal instinct which makes unfortunate children the dearest, I reintroduce my first-born to the public which has so kindly welcomed my later offspring.” The original edition appeared in 1864, with A. K. Loring as publisher. The plot of the story turns on the history of a young woman who loved one man and married another, and it will be found fully up to the merit of many a work which in late years has made an author’s reputation. It is a good example of honest opinions in an enthusiastic young woman candidly expressed. The promise of the composition has been fully realized.

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“Moods.” Boston Courier
‘falling into a vortex,’ as she expressed it, shutting herself up in her room and scribbling. Having completed her first novel, she took it to a publisher, who offered to publish it if she would ‘cut it down one-third and omit all the parts she particularly admired.’ Having done this she confidingly sent the poor little romance, like a picked robin, out into the big, busy world.” Those who read the story in its present form with its omissions and its restorations will not be surprised that Miss Alcott has been induced to give it to readers of fiction in this revised shape, for, as it now stands, it is a charming tale full of that intuitive knowledge of character which has distinguished the author’s later and more celebrated works. Sylvia, the heroine, is admirably drawn. In whatever mood she is presented she is genuinely lifelike, and the circumstances by which she learns to live by principle, not impulse, never violate the modesty of nature. There is, perhaps, a youthful exuberance of description that might have been advantageously curbed when the book was first written, but we are glad that it has been retained, for it shows us the advance the writer has made in her art.


Miss Alcott experienced with this novel the inconvenience of a meddling publisher, and has been only now able to print the story as originally designed. Now that “Little Women” and other books have brought her fame and fortune, she has her revenge. Her heroine is not killed off, however, as in the first draft, and several chapters have been dropped. Moreover, the book has been “pruned of as much fine writing as could be done without destroying the youthful spirit of the little romance.” So that, after all, we do not get exactly what Miss Alcott wrote at first.


Between the first publication of Miss Alcott’s “Moods” in 1864, and its republication now with many changes both of addition and omission, so much has taken place in the literary career of the author, that it would be injustice both to her and to this early novel to pass it by without mention. In 1864 Miss Alcott was not an unknown writer, for she had met with one great literary success, – the popularity of her “Hospital Sketches,” published in a newspaper here in 1863, then circulated in other newspapers all over the country, and finally in a little book, published by James Redpath, going into the camps and libraries of that period of civil war, in which Miss Alcott, after her manner had been active, and in which she nearly lost her life. But “one swallow does not make a summer,” and one “hit” does not secure an author established fame. For some years after 1863 Miss Alcott failed to get the ear of the public again, and when she brought forward her early novel, written in the youthful inexperience of her home-life, and shaped from without by what she had read rather than by what she knew inwardly, it fell – not dead but mostly unregarded from the press. It so happened that another American novel,
“Emily Chester,” came out at the same time, and had a wide celebrity, – and this dealing rather willfully with the question of marriage, while Miss Alcott also made marriage her theme – the two became confused together on the public mind, and Miss Alcott was supposed by many to be dealing insidious blows at the peace of society and the stability of the marriage relation. Nothing could be more unjust, – for the story was a romantic impossibility, as far from moral evil as the fancies of an enthusiastic girl are from the prosaic realities of married life.

These very traits of romance and enthusiasm kept the book along and it found fresh readers every year, until Miss Alcott’s growing popularity made it in demand for other reasons. She would gladly have suppressed it, but the copyright was out of her hands, and it is only within a few months that she has acquired the right to deal with it as she would. The first step she took was to revise and re-cast it, so that now, although the characters are mainly the same, she has thrown out of it the element that made the hero – Adam Warwick – halt between two loves, a worthy and an unworthy one, and has made him a more consistent character but perhaps not a more real one. She has also removed everything that might make readers distrust the moral of the story, and now it no longer need remind us of “Emily Chester” or of Goethe’s “Elective Affinities.” All this is as it should be. The author also with the surer and more practiced hand of a successful writer has toned down the effusiveness of the early style, and brought the story more within the scope of ordinary experiences in New England. In her preface, which is in some respects the best part of the book, she says: “When ‘Moods’ was first published marriage appeared to be the theme, instead of an attempt to show the mistake of a moody nature, guided by impulse, not principle. Of the former subject a girl of 18 could know but little, – of the latter, most girls know a good deal; and they alone have divined the real purpose of the book, in spite of its many faults, and have thanked me for it. [Additional sentence omitted.]”

It is impossible to give to “Moods” the interest of character and incident which makes a novel irresistible; though the story is not ill-contrived, and the descriptions are clear, vivid and picturesque. It will derive its chief interest, I suspect, from the light it throws on the author herself, and on the truly romantic circle of which she has made a part, and which she has done so much to portray. Judging the future by the past, it will be a long time before the ideally real life of a New England circle, in which Emerson, Alcott, Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, Thoreau, Parker, Jones Very, Lowell and Phillips had a place, will cease to attract the notice of Americans and Europeans. That indescribable something which makes the fortunes of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio interesting, – which makes us wish to know more of Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare and Raleigh, – of Milton and Marvell, – of Goethe, Schiller and Bettine, of Wordsworth and Coleridge, of Carlyle and his friends, – has fixed itself in the fortunes of New England idealists of whom Miss Alcott is one. She writes as one, to be sure, who has been among them, but not of them, – and she gives her fancy a wide range about the circumstances of their lives. Still it is from them and their companions and the general environment that she has made her studies of life – whether superficial or profound; and “Moods” will be read – now and then at least – for the glimpses it gives through a fancifully colored medium of the Massachusetts Arcadia, in which so many gentle shepherds have sojourned. It is itself a pastoral of its own kind, and suggests the idyllic period, when for want of real woes and blisses we contrive fantastic ones.
Mr. A. K. Loring, our Boston publisher who brought out the first edition of “Moods,” feels somewhat aggrieved at the reproaches which have been cast upon him for altering that book. He says his only agency was in suggesting that the original manuscript was too voluminous for him to publish. He made no changes in it. Mrs. C. H. Dall undertook this work, at the request of the author. Mrs. Dall cut out all the chapters that were cancelled. Mr. Loring remembers only one case of his own interfering. Miss Alcott would have eliminated the chapter entitled “The Golden Wedding,” and substituted another for it. This was so charming a piece of writing that Mr. Loring did not want to part with it. It is in the revised edition, and is very beautiful in itself, but it has no connection whatever with the story. “Moods” was not Miss Alcott’s first published work, though it was her first written one. “Hospital Sketches” had preceded it. “Moods” was not really a failure. It sold enough to pay a profit to the publisher and a royalty to the author. Miss Alcott had tried for some years to get possession of the plates, but could not agree to Mr. Loring’s price for them. On his failure in business they fell into Mr. Niles’s hands. The new edition is not much, if any, larger than the old. It is better arranged, and the ending of the story is in better taste. Mr. Loring bought short stories from Miss Alcott after this book came out, for which he used to pay her a hundred and a hundred a [and] fifty dollars apiece, selling them at retail for ten cents a copy. They sold well at his counter, but the newsdealers did not like fiction in this form. So he gave up publishing for her. He heard at this time that she had another book, much larger, nearly ready; but he thought he would not risk it. That book was “Little Women.” He tells now with a rueful face of his lost opportunity. Mr. Niles accepted it with avidity, and no work issued since that period has made so much money for its publishers.

Roberts Brothers issue, in a very neat form, a new, revised, and much-enlarged edition of the first volume published by Miss L. M. Alcott. It is entitled Moods. Its outcome and moral have been entirely changed. The former edition was mangled to meet the desires of the publisher, but this has been limited only by the requisitions of the story. It is the old tale, freshly told, of a young woman’s loving one man and marrying another. Disappointment and temporary separation ensue; but years, discipline, and a life of unselfish consecration to the welfare of others mellow the affections, awaken old love, and bring the estranged household together in real affection. The lovers of “Little Women” will be sure to give the right hand of fellowship to this new old work.

Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s re-issue of her novel of “Moods” (Boston: Roberts

Zion’s Herald 59.5 (1 February 1882): 34:7.

Brothers,) is chiefly noticeable for the con-
ditions under which it is put forth. It is
Miss Alcott’s first book, and was writ-
ten thirty years ago, when the author was
a young woman. Miss Alcott avers that
“age, that brings the philosophic mind,”
has convinced her that she was much mis-
taken, or rather, very ignorant, in her es-
timates of character in that earlier time,
and she declares that she has reconstructed
“Moods” in accordance with her wider
view of life. Much has been taken from
the book as first printed, and much added
to it, so that it is practically a new work.
It may be this, but it is not an especially
strong one; and it is not for a moment to
be compared with “Little Women” and its
congeners, which have had such a deserved
popularity. “Moods” was written as a kind
of settler of the “unsatisfied yearnings” of
young girlhood, and, with all the wider
views with which it has been charged, it
remains a rather immature performance.
Even at eighteen, however, Miss Alcott
gave indications of the pleasant powers she
afterwards so satisfactorily developed.

The Christian Register
61.6 (9 February 1882): 4:1.

We read the original “Moods” years ago.
We liked it then, not for the charm of any
literary finish and power, but because there
glowed in its pages a personal presence of
the author. It spoke from the inner world
of an individual life. Miss Alcott loved the
book, and determined to see it more fully
understood by the public. Here is the child
ripened into maturer features. Excision of
whole chapters, pruning of style, elabora-
tion of certain thoughts, and a robustness
of tone, have improved this story, which
came to us as the first production from
a pen destined to work busily and well
in after-time. We can believe the author
when she says that into it at first went “the
love, labor, and enthusiasm that no later
book can possess.” The death of Warwick
is pathetic, yet such self-forgetfulness stirs
the heart’s blood. No analysis of the book
is required. The sparkling narrative runs
on, always disclosing character, and leav-
ing us the richer by contrasts of the su-
periority of sense, goodness, and sincerity
over the mean and shallow. Miss Alcott
has been a great benefactor to young and
old, and has done much to lift literature for
the young out of silliness, goodyism, and
vulgarity.

The Springfield Daily
Union (14 February

Miss Louisa M. Alcott has special reasons
for republishing her Moods, the first book
from her pen. When it was first brought
out by Loring, the publisher thought it was
too voluminous, and Mrs C. H. Dall was
employed to prune it. The result was to
change Miss Alcott’s leading idea, bring-
ing forward marriage rather than the mis-
takes of an impulsive nature as the aim
of the story. Miss Alcott has restored the
book to the original interest, has struck
out some chapters and restored others, so
that those who were first delighted with
the book will desire to read it in its new
form. The style, however, shows what an
advance Miss Alcott has made since her
first attempt. It is at times thin and at times
turgid, though some chapters could not be
improved.
The Atlantic Monthly
49.293 (March 1882): 431.

Miss Alcott’s story of Moods, which was published several years ago, has been re-published in a new edition (Roberts), which becomes almost a new book, since the author, with a praiseworthy literary conscience, has rewritten portions and made the novel over.

The Sunday School Times

Miss Louisa M. Alcott has rewritten her strong and meritorious novel of Moods (Roberts Brothers), to its manifest improvement.


Miss Alcott’s Moods was not accounted a success on its first appearance, many years since, nor do we find in this new and revised edition of it any reason for reversing the verdict passed upon it then. Its reappearance after such a lapse of time is easily explainable by the latent tenderness which authors are apt to entertain for those early efforts which antedated their success – the stepping-stones by which they climbed to better things. In her preface to Moods Miss Alcott alludes to the “love, labor, and enthusiasm” which went into the making of this, her first book, and which no later book could possess. She does not mention, and perhaps fails to see, the crudity of style, the morbid tone, the youthful ignorance of men and manners which are no less its distinguishing characteristics. We are sorry that Miss Alcott tried the experiment of resuscitating an early failure which is best forgotten, and we shall be glad to forget “Moods” in both its past and present tense as soon as she gives us another story written in her later and happier manner.

The Critic 2.36 (20 May 1882): 139.

The differences in the two editions of Miss Alcott’s ‘Moods’ are slight, but interesting, as showing how little essential to the novelist’s art are the conditions on which the novelist is apt to rely. The entire omission of the most dramatic episode in the earlier book – probably the episode on which Miss Alcott most prided herself at the time – is found to leave the little story just as interesting and much more dignified; while the cheerful solution of Sylvia’s difficulties at the close of the present edition is far more acceptable to readers who could not hope for consolation or help in their own troubles from the dramatic ending of the first edition. We cannot all die when death would be the easiest relief from our tragedies; but we may live and make them considerably less tragic if we will. Miss Alcott does well to enforce this change of moral, and we commend the confession and correction of a literary and moral mistake.
Note to the Editor: By glancing over the enclosed bundle of rusty old manuscript, you will perceive that I once made a great discovery: the discovery that certain sorts of things which, from the beginning of the world, had always been regarded as merely "curious coincidences" – that is to say, accidents – were no more accidental than is the sending and receiving of a telegram an accident. . . .

Here is another case. I clip it from a newspaper:

“The republication of Miss Alcott’s novel Moods recalls to a writer in the Boston Post a singular coincidence which was brought to light before the book was first published: ‘Miss Anna M. Crane, of Baltimore, published Emily Chester, a novel which was pronounced a very striking and strong story. A comparison of this book with Moods showed that the two writers, though entire strangers to each other, and living hundreds of miles apart, had both chosen the same subject for their novels, had followed almost the same line of treatment up to a certain point, where the parallel ceased, and the dénouements were entirely opposite. And even more curious, the leading characters in both books had identically the same names, so that the names in Miss Alcott’s novel had to be changed. Then the book was published by Loring.”

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

MORNING GLORIES, AND OTHER STORIES (1868, 1871)
Providence Daily Journal

–a book of pretty fancies, and written in graceful style.

The New-York Times
17.5086 (13 January 1868): 2:4.

This is one of the most charming books for little readers we have met with in a long time. The stories are told in easy, pleasant style, the moral not too obtrusively apparent, and the illustrations are exceedingly spirited and graceful.


We congratulate all the children among whose Christmas treasures, the good Santa Claus has placed this book of charming stories. Flowers and children, by their graces and their needs, are so naturally associated that it is fitting for flowers to be invested with children’s natures, that thereby the little ones may see themselves as others see them. Nothing could teach more beautifully, a lesson of industry and gentleness and meekness, than the experiences of the three little Roses – Blush, Brier and Moss. The lessons of all these stories are noble, the imagery charming, and the writing fresh and original. We instinctively ask for more from the pen of one who understands little children so well, and who has such power to please them and help them to be good.

Boston Daily Advertiser
118.106 (2 November 1871): 2:3.

These stories were some of the earliest efforts of Miss Alcott, and we are quite confident she does not favor such a presentation of the work of her pen as is made by this volume.

Hartford Daily Courant
35.261 (3 November 1871): 1:8.

Morning Glories is the first of and gives the title to a collection of stories by Louisa M. Alcott, the author of “Little Women,” the charming writer for the young, whose books the elders like as much as the children. These are captivating stories, in her sprightly manner, and with all her understanding of the little folks. The publishers have made it an attractive holiday book (it opens with a song of Christmas) by neat printing and binding and a few lovely illustrations. We have seen nothing more likely to delight the children than these stories.
Lee & Shepard have from Carleton & Co. “Morning-Glories and Other Stories,” a reprint of pieces by L. M. Alcott, that have appeared in the periodicals for children, we believe. There is nothing to indicate that this illustrated volume is a venture of the author, who does not hold the copyright in her own hands, whilst the typography and pictures are not such as her other productions have worn.

**Lawrence Daily American**

13.110 (7 November 1871): 2:3.

*Morning Glories* is the appropriate title under which Carleton, New York, publishes a collection of the earlier writings of that charming and now famous story teller, Miss Louise M. Alcott, author of Little Women, etc. It contains fourteen selections, making a volume of two hundred pages, and the many admirers of this graceful writer will be glad to obtain another of her books. The young people, especially, delight to read her pleasantly and brightly told stories, ever fresh and sparkling.

**[Bangor Daily Whig?]** ([1871?]). Clippings File.

Carleton & Co., have just issued *Morning Glories*, and other stories, a new work from the pen of Miss Alcott, which is certainly one of the most delightful books for children that we have ever seen; everything is so fresh and sweet in its simplicity that even the grown up reader seems to feel the dew of youth once more upon his brow, as he revels in the charming fancies.

**[Buffalo Courier?]** ([1871?]). Clippings File.

This is a garland of sprightly and graceful stories for little folks, by the ever popular author of “Little Women,” expressly designed for the coming holidays. The book is prettily illustrated, and cannot fail to win the hearts of those for whom it is designed. The *Sunday School Gazette* speaks of it, and perhaps not extravagantly, in the following strain: “Delicious! That is the most expressive condensed criticism of this lovely book. Almost any child, from five to ten, will enjoy having it read to them; and those that don’t, ought to. The exquisite grace with which the stories are told is no small part of its attraction; it is so desirable to accustom our children to good English.”

**[New York Standard?]** ([1871?]). Clippings File.

“Morning Glories” by Miss Alcott, is another volume which will probably be hailed with delight by all children who are familiar with Miss Alcott’s wonderful power of interesting them. The paper
upon which it is printed is not so fine as that of the other books is, but the illustrations are full of spirit and individuality, and the stories brim with reproductions of flesh and blood children. As the creatrice of children Miss Alcott is equaled by only one or two writers of English, and the above-mentioned volume illustrates this singular and valuable gift quite as richly as any other from her pen.

“Morning Glories” is a charming little volume by Miss Alcott, author of “Little Women,” “Little Men,” etc. It is a beautifully printed, bound and illustrated – a most attractive book for the holidays. Almost any child, from five to ten, will enjoy having it read to them. The exquisite grace with which the stories are told, is no small part of the attraction. “Little Women” has become a favorite, and to make this volume a welcome candidate for popular favor, it need only be said that Miss Alcott is the author.

[Portland Transcript?].
Clippings File.

Very charming little stories are those written by Louise M. Alcott, and published in a prettily illustrated volume by G. W. Carleton & Co. under the title of Morning Glories. A graceful, imaginative element runs through them, which together with their freshness and vivacity will make them very attractive to youthful readers. The story of “What the Swallows Did” is an amusing travesty of village gossip and at the same time teaches a good lesson in an unobtrusive way.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

The Overland Monthly 8.1 (January 1872): 104.
KITTY’S CLASS-DAY; AUNT KIPP; PSYCHE’S ART (1868; REPRINTED TOGETHER IN LOUISA MAY ALCOTT’S PROVERB STORIES, 1868; THREE PROVERB STORIES, 1868, 1871; KITTY’S CLASS-DAY, AND OTHER STORIES, 1876; PROVERB STORIES, 1882)
This is not a new book, but a new edition of three exquisite stories that appeared two or three years ago. It is charmingly illustrated by Hoppin. The stories illustrate the proverbs, “A Stitch in Time,” “Children and Fools speak the Truth,” and “Handsome is that Handsome Does.”

Detroit Advertiser.
Quoted in advertisement in Boston Daily Evening Transcript 44.12,618 (26 May 1871): [3]:6.

This taking little morceau is given to whet our appetites probably – though that is needless – for the coming sequel to “Little Women,” by reminding us of Miss Alcott’s piquancy and bonhomme [bonhomie]. We can testify to her power as a writer, for we saw a broad smile on a face generally too full of the cares of business and of life generally to be thus beguiled, when the eyes rested on Toady’s three wants – “a mustache, a beaver, and a sweetheart – three things, and I’ve got to wait for them all,” and the smile broadened into a hearty laugh as the story was ended. Hoppin has dressed the stories each with a speaking picture.

Scribner’s Monthly 2.2 (June 1871): 219.

It is always a pleasure to see Miss Alcott’s name on the title-page of a story. She is coming at last into fair recognition as a writer of good, wholesome, brisk, everyday little stories, with ‘no nonsense in them,’ as boys say of girls they like. She does not aim to be artistic, or finished, or eloquent; and yet she is sometimes all three. Her Three Proverb Stories, just reprinted by Loring, Boston, are capital illustrations of her peculiar style. “Kitty’s Class Day” is as perfect a little picture as any French painter in “genre” ever painted. Not a New England girl to-day in a college town but has had just such “times” over a gown for “commencement.”

The Commonwealth 14th year.40 (3 June 1876): [1]:7.

Whoever gives us of Louisa M. Alcott’s writings confers a general favor. In that category stands A. K. Loring, who presents a new edition of Miss Alcott’s three stories in one volume – Kitty’s Class-Day, Aunt Kipp, and Psyche’s Art. The stories illustrate respectively the maxims, “A stitch in time saves nine,” “Children and fools speak the truth,” and “Handsome is that handsome does.” Augustus Hoppin adds six illustrations. They are good, wholesome, everyday stories, which young or old can read with satisfaction and pleasure.

Arthur’s Illustrated Home Magazine 44.8 (August 1876): 454.

This is a collection of three stories by the well-known and talented authoress, which will be read with interest by all. The last
one in the volume, “Psyche’s Art,” is especially worthy of commendation.


Miss Alcott makes new drafts on our kindly disposition in presenting . . . her _Proverb Stories_, eight in number, “various waifs and strays,” as she calls them, to appease the young people that clamor for more of her writings. One of the stories she deems “romantic rubbish,” and suggests that it will show what ought not to be written, yet it once paid well to indulge in such compositions.

_The Independent_ 34.1769 (26 October 1882): 11:3.

_Proverb Stories_, by the same author and from the same publishers, is a collection of miscellaneous inventions of less merit than the preceding [An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving] and which get their title from the fact that each one is supposed to be spun out of a proverb, like a sermon from a text. The collection is marred by the introduction of “The Baron’s Gloves,” a very youthful production and recognized as such by the author, who, instead of committing it to the flames or hiding it in her desk, publishes it to the world as a “sample of the romantic rubbish which paid so well once upon a time. If it shows them [i.e., young writers] what not to write, it will not have been rescued from oblivion in vain.” We recall nothing to equal this illustration of “voluntary humility” this side of the clergyman who, in public prayer, declared himself ready to go to all lengths in his devotion; “Yea, Lord,” he cried, “we are ready even to disgrace ourselves.”

_The Sunday School Times_ 24.43 (28 October 1882): 682.

Although Miss Louisa M. Alcott has been forbidden by her physician to write anything more at present, she has not been forbidden to gather and republish her contributions to the magazines. Accordingly, among the fall books there are two which bear her name: _Proverb Stories_ and _Aunt Jo’s Scrap-bag_, Vol. VI. _Proverb Stories_ contains eight tales – two of them Christmas stories – with morals not too prominent.


Miss Louisa M. Alcott, having been forbidden by physicians to write anything at present, has collected “various waifs and strays” under the title of _Proverb Stories_, which she hopes “will appease the young people who clamor for more, forgetting the mortal brains need rest.” The book also contains “The Baron’s Gloves,” one of “Jo March’s” earliest literary efforts, and the whole volume makes a most
interesting collection. Roberts’ Brothers of Boston publish the book in a very neat typographical manner and Whitney & Adams have the book for sale.

The Critic 2.50 (2 December 1882): 326.

Good wine needs no bush, and Miss Alcott needs no reviewer. It is true that her style has changed a little since the publication of ‘Little Women;’ her little people incline more to a style of thought and conversation suggestive of the Sunday-school, and the present volume of ‘Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag’ [vol. 6] has much to do with fairies. But everything of hers is sure to be entertaining, and if in the ‘Proverb Stories’, many of which are already familiar to her readers, she has included a somewhat sensational tale, called ‘The Baron’s Gloves,’ she confesses in her preface that it is only done to gratify the curiosity of those who have wondered just how ‘Jo’ began her literary work, and to show other beginners what not to write.


Although out of health and forbidden to write, so great has been the importunity of her young readers that Miss Alcott has also responded to their demands with a volume of Proverb Stories, consisting of various waifs and strays, written for young people, and, though not new, sufficiently captivating perhaps to satisfy the most exacting, among her admirers, at least.

The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art 54.1415 (9 December 1882): 774.

We are a little puzzled as to the class of readers for which Miss Alcott’s Proverb Stories are intended. Not for children, at least not for English children; for there is a great deal of love-making, while the tales are hardly of sufficient weight to satisfy the demands of later and more exacting years. “Kitty’s Class Day” is a sketch of the typical American damsel (of fiction) who contrives to make an elegant toilet out of the commonest materials, and is rewarded somewhat unkindly by discovering that she would have had more real happiness had she appeared among her brilliant companions in a much-washed muslin. We doubt whether the moral is true to human nature, least of all to American human nature. Miss Alcott has, however, a bright picturesque way of telling things, which is particularly exemplified in “A Country Christmas.”


We are sorry to gather from Miss Alcott’s preface that she has found amusement in collecting these hedgerow children of her pen, because disqualified for more strenuous work. Few writers for girl-life have been so successful as she. Her intuitive
knowledge of girl nature, her dainty fancies, her discriminating taste, have given her an exceptional popularity among English-speaking peoples. These two volumes [also An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving] contain twenty stories, gathered, we imagine, from a variety of sources. They will sufficiently commend themselves to Miss Alcott’s admirers.


Besides these new stories from *Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag* [vol. 6], Miss Alcott has coined in her own mint and stamped with her own superscription a volume of engaging *Proverb Stories*, each of which illustrates the moral of some well-known proverb by the disposition and doings of its central characters.

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**Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices**

*Putnam’s Magazine* n.s. 2.12 (December 1868): 760.
*Putnam’s Monthly Magazine* n.s. 3.14 (February 1869): 267.
*The Overland Monthly* 6.6 (June 1871): 584.
LITTLE WOMEN; OR, MEG, JO, BETH AND AMY, PARTS 1 (1868) AND 2 (1869)
Miss Alcott has no superior in the country as a writer for girls.

His [Bronson Alcott’s] daughter, Louisa M. Alcott, is already known as a popular writer of several sketches and stories, and is unquestionably one of the best writers for the young that New England has produced for many years. Under her skillful editorial management, “Merry's Museum” is rapidly reaching its old rank as one of the foremost magazines for children in the United States. She has a book of stories for girls in the press of Roberts Brothers.

Roberts Brothers of this city have published a volume which cannot fail to take a high rank among the juveniles of the season. It is called “Little Women; or Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy: by Louisa M. Alcott.” The book is fresh, sparkling, natural, and full of soul. In characterization it displays uncommon excellence, as compared with ordinary books for girls. The illustrations, by Miss May Alcott, are very vigorous and impressive.

We can pronounce it an excellent book for young folks, and far from uninteresting to those of larger growth.

“Little Women” is a charming story, which will set wild all the little women after it. It is bound to have many readers, and it will please all who like a sprightly, sparkling, lively story. It is particularly for the feminine portion of humanity.

Little Women, or Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, by Louisa M. Alcott, is one of the most attractive and delightful of children’s books issued for many a day. Few writers bear along with them so successfully the expressions, desires, sympathies and feelings of children as Miss Alcott, and the happy consequence is that her portraiture of child-life is real, penetrating and
abiding. The history of these four little women will be found faithful to life, and the source of infinite pleasure to all readers. Miss May Alcott illustrates the volume very creditably.

*Springfield Daily Union*  

A charming book for girls, inculcating in a pleasant, cheerful way lessons which the young need to learn, to make home happy and their lives desirable. It is a beautiful family picture, not too perfect so as to render it unnatural and impossible, but just what every christian home under judicious training should and may be. We commend it to our young readers, as a volume they can read with pleasure and profit. It is put up in a neat tasteful style and will be a good present for the holidays.

(15 October 1868): [1]:4.

Roberts Bros. have lately published two very attractive books of the juvenile order, though we fancy grown people will be as much interested in them as the young folks, especially in Miss Louisa Alcott's "Little Women." It is the story of four sisters, whose ages range from eleven to sixteen, and is related with so much naturalness and vivacity that we predict for it a much more permanent success than usually falls to the lot of modern story-books. The characterization is very clever, the girls talk and act like real girls (*American* girls we must add, however, for English children would scarcely use so frequently the word "guess" as a substitute for "think" or "suppose"). The incidents are simple, as well as lively, and the interest well-sustained. The tone of the book is healthy and the moral, without being obtrusive, sufficiently well marked to suit, we think, the most rigid of parents and guardians.

*Springfield Daily Republican* 25.252  

Miss Louisa Alcott's "Little Women" is a girls' book of quite another sort [from Sophie May's]. The name describes its field well. They are not children but "little women" whom she portrays; her characters, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, are girls with the instincts of womanhood strong and active, but without the simplicity of childhood. The restless and confused period which divides the child from the woman is here represented under four different aspects, and with a great variety of domestic incident. The four sisters are natural in their sayings and strivings, because they are drawn from life, – and yet there is much that would seem unnatural, could we forget the age and character of the four. They vary from ten to sixteen years old, at the outset of the story, and are the daughters and only children of Mr March, a chaplain in the Union army, who leaves his family poor at home, while he follows the camps, summer and winter, and at last falls sick and lies in the hospital for months. His family in the meantime play the drama of life around the fireside at home; the mother directs the affairs of the household, while the four daughters act plays together, write stories, edit newspapers, go to parties, fall
in love, quarrel and make up again, stroll in the woods, sail on the river, make new acquaintances, and do all those thousand things that lively girls find to busy themselves about. And there is much pleasure in threading the tangled story, from end to end, and a good deal of interest felt in the fortunes of each sister, and all her adventures, at home and abroad. In the details of the piece the great talent of Miss Alcott is shown to advantage; she manages scenes better than most story-tellers; but her plot is defective, and does not do itself justice. What most impresses one in reading the book is the wealth of resources at her command, within the limited sphere of her story. There are scarcely any but purely domestic events, for the war and its incidents count for but little; yet these household adventures are wonderfully varied and rich; such as children will not much care for; but they will attract the girl and boy who have an inkling of the world beyond the children’s horizon. The book is published by Roberts Brothers, and sold by Bridgman. It is illustrated from drawings by Miss May Alcott, which have not had full justice done them by the engraver . . . It is a pity, for the artist’s idea in all the sketches was a good one.

The girls who like good stories have a rich treat in store for them in Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s new book, which she calls Little Women, or Meg; Jo., Beth. and Amy [sic]. In it Miss Alcott displays her great abilities as a good story teller in a remarkable manner, and the book is full of striking and pleasing incidents. We know one “little woman” who laughed over it till she cried, and declares it to be the nicest book she ever read. It will have a great run with the “little women” of America.

The Nation 7.173 (22 October 1868): 335.

Miss Alcott’s new juvenile is an agreeable little story, which is not only very well adapted to the readers for whom it is especially intended, but may also be read with pleasure by older people. The girls depicted all belong to healthy types, and are drawn with a certain cleverness, although there is in the book a lack of what painters call atmosphere – things and people being painted too much in “local colors,” and remaining, under all circumstances, somewhat too persistently themselves. The letterpress is accompanied by four or five indifferently executed illustrations, in which Miss May Alcott betrays not only a want of anatomical knowledge, and that indifference to or non-recognition of the subtle beauty of the lines of the female figure which so generally marks women artists, but also the fact that she has not closely studied the text which she illustrates.

Zion’s Herald 45.43 (22 October 1868): 509:3.

Little Women, by Miss Alcott, (Roberts Bros.), is a vivacious story of four girls and their hardly older mother, judging from the picture. What she should know of poverty

is hard to conceive. We dislike the dis-
spiritualizing in it of Bunyon's [Bunyan's]
great Allegory. No child should be taught
any less evangelism than that. The fight
with Apollyon is reduced to a conflict with
an evil temper, and the Palace Beautiful
and Vanity Fair are made to be only or-
dinary virtues or temptations. We cannot
commend the book as its quality merits.
It is without Christ, and hence perilous
in proportion to its assimilation to Chris-
tian forms. Don't put in the Sunday School
library.

The Independent 20.1039
(29 October 1868): 6:3.

Little Women, by Louisa M. Alcott
(Roberts Brothers, Boston), is the most
sweetly quiet story, if story it can be called,
that we have read for many a day, running
over with a homely humor that is delight-
ful. We trust the author will not soon lay
down her pen.

The Youth’s Companion
41.44 (29 October 1868):
176:2.

An exceedingly sprightly, wide-awake vol-
ume. Miss Alcott excels in writing for
young people, and in this book she gives a
very graphic account of a year in the life of
four sisters, during the absence of their fa-
thor, who was a chaplain in the army. The
four girls were totally unlike in their char-
acter and manners, and the story of their
adventures and misadventures is sure to
interest the class of readers for whom it is
designed.

Eclectic Magazine n.s.
8.5 (November 1868):
1414.

Within the past twenty years, the pro-
portions to which children’s literature has
attained is well calculated to excite aston-
ishment. There is no end to the making of
books, tales, magazines, and papers for the
young people, and the immense circulation
which some of them have reached shows
that they are recognized as an important
educational influence.

The majority of them, it is true, consist
of piling, do-me-good copy-book moral-
ity, calculated to turn the stomach of any
sensible child; but occasionally something
really valuable and meritorious is pro-
duced. “Little Women” is one of these. The
tone is healthy and wholesome, the scenes
are natural, and the incidents varied and
amusing.

Miss Alcott has evidently studied chil-
dren, and is too appreciative of the
truly beautiful in childhood to attempt
to preach them into stiff-backed, spiritless
propriety.

The Little Women of the author are of
course decidedly more lovable and intelli-
gent than little women ever are, and the
humor is often strained and feeble; but, as
Mr. Snagsby says, “not to put too fine a
point upon it,” the book is, on the whole,
an excellent one of its class.

Hours at Home 8.1
(November 1868): 100.

A capital story for girls.
The Ladies’ Repository
[Cincinnati] 2.5
(November 1868): 472.

This is a very readable juvenile book. It is beautifully printed and bound, and well illustrated. The story of four lively girls is vivaciously told. But it is not a Christian book. It is religion without spirituality, and salvation without Christ. It is not a good book for the Sunday school library.

American Literary Gazette

There is plenty of incident and of sprightly conversation in this story, and it cannot fail to please young people, especially the little school girls.


This is a very entertaining book, written in a most attractive style, humorous and pathetic by turns, but of rare excellence in its moral tone. We hope it may carry its beautiful lessons of patience in noble living into many households. It is the story of four young girls whose father is absent from home as chaplain in the army, and whose noble, heroic mother, disciplined herself by their reverses of fortune, inspires them with an appreciation of the dignity of labor, and teaches them the mystery of conquering besetting sins. The characters of these young girls are skilfully portrayed, their marked characteristics well sustained in all the narrated incidents of their home life. They are not described as angels, but as natural, human children, with good and evil impulses struggling for the mastery in their undeveloped natures. Meg, loving and ambitious; Jo, impetuous yet generous; Beth, shy and amiable; and Amy, the aspiring embryo artist, all find in their attempt to “play Pilgrim’s Progress” that they are burdened with a “bundle of naughties.” They pass through the “Slough of Despond,” and the “Valley of Humiliation,” find the “Palace Beautiful,” struggle with “Apollyon,” and are sorely tempted at “Vanity Fair.” How much real growth they realized in this discipline will be seen in the greeting their father gives them when he returns to his happy home. To Meg he says: “I remember a time when this hand was white and smooth, and your first care was to keep it so. It was very pretty then, but to me it is much prettier now – for in these seeming blemishes I read a little history. [2 sentences omitted].”

In Jo, he rather misses his “wild girl,” but says “If I get a strong, helpful tender-hearted woman in her place I shall feel quite satisfied.” Beth receives a word of cheer, and of Amy he observes “That she does not fret much, nor prink at the glass, and has not even mentioned a very pretty ring which she wears; . . . [remainder of 2 sentences omitted].”

This story is to be especially commended for the wholesome lessons it teaches concerning honorable labor. We quote a little poem written by “Topsy-Turvy
Jo,” who gives early promise of literary talent:

“A Song from the Suds”

“Queen of my tub, I merrily sing,
While the white foam rises high
...” [Remainder of 4 quoted stanzas omitted.]

The illustrations, four in number, are by Miss May Alcott, and are highly credible.

Arthur’s Home Magazine
32 (December 1868):
375.

This is decidedly the best Christmas story which we have seen for a long time. The heroines (there are four of them) are the “little women” of the title, ranging from twelve to sixteen years of age, each interesting in her way, and together enacting the most comical scenes and achieving most gratifying results. The father is in the army, and it is to please him that his daughters make an effort of a year to correct certain faults in their dispositions. In this they are quite successful, and the father comes home, after many sad war scenes, to find his little ones greatly improved in many respects, a comfort and joy to both their parents. The book is most originally written. It never gets commonplace or wearisome, though it deals with the most ordinary every-day life. Parents desiring a Christmas book for a girl from ten to sixteen years, cannot do better than to purchase this.

The writer almost promises, as the story is concluded, to follow this volume with others of similar character. We sincerely hope she will.

Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine 77.462
(December 1868): 546.

Miss Alcott has written a lively story for the young, as its title indicates. Its heroines are four young girls ranging in ages from twelve to sixteen years. Their experiences and adventures, as narrated by the authoress, make an exceedingly interesting story.

The Ladies’ Repository

Capital! The little folks, and the children of larger growth like it. Our Sabbath Schools will all want it.

The Lady’s Friend
5.12 (December 1868):
857.

A capital story for girls – sure to please them, and sure to influence them for good. “Illustrated by May Alcott:” looks as if one sister had written the book, and another designed for it. We do not know that it is so, but it suggests what a pretty employment for women is this designing for books, and another employment, wood-engraving, both in great and increasing demand. Mothers should encourage in their
little ones the amusement of drawing. This early culture of eye and hand may much facilitate the acquisition of a valuable art. It is said, that the best illustrations in the English magazines are the work of young ladies who have adopted drawing as a profession. Some of the most amusing sporting pictures in Punch are from the pencil of a lady, and several of our American magazines are illustrated by lady artists.

We gave it to a little girl of twelve to read, for whose opinion we have great respect, and she pronounced it just the *nicest* book. “I could read it right through three times, and it would be nicer and funnier every time.” And to our certain knowledge, she read it twice in one week, and would have read it again, had not the book been carried off.

[Stedman, E. C., or R. H. Stoddard].
*Putnam’s Magazine* n.s. 2.12 (December 1868): 760.

Verily there is a new era in this country in the literature for children. It is not very long since all the juvenile books seemed conducted on the principle of the definition of duty “doing what you don’t want to,” for the books that were interesting were not considered good, and the “good” ones were certainly not interesting. Most Sunday-school books were stories of unnaturally good and pious boys and girls, who, however, were not attractive enough to rouse a desire of imitation in the youthful breast.

But now we have a different order of things, and books for children are about as varied in their scope as those for grown people. One of the pleasantest books we have read for a long time is, *Little Women* (Roberts Bro’s), the story of four young girls, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. This is a thoroughly natural and charming book, fresh and full of life, and we heartily recommend it to all young people, big or little.

[Albany newspaper?] ([1868?]). Clippings File.

This is a very sprightly domestic novel, calculated to excite considerable interest in Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, the heroines of the tale, and to produce a desire to know more about them.

[Augusta Chronicle?] ([1868]). Clippings File.

This is a very charming little book, written by a lady who knows how to please her readers; and it is printed in a very neat and handsome style of typography, pretty and substantial binding; and illustrated with several appropriate engravings. The following preface will perhaps give a little insight into this very interesting little book:

“Go then, my little Book, and show to all
That entertain, and bid thee welcome shall,
What thou dost keep close shut up in thy breast;
...” [Remainder of 12 quoted lines omitted.]
Herald? ([1868?]). Clippings File.

This is a charming little volume for the entertainment of the “younkers” at home. The story, written mostly in dialogue style, is the happy and pleasing picture of a family of four girls, their mother, and their father, who was in the army during the recent rebellion. The picture is natural, of natural things, and does credit to the author as a writer for the young folks. It will be duly appreciated in the family where there are any young folks, and deserves an extensive sale.

[Providence newspaper?] ([1868?]). Clippings File.

In noting books written for young folks, we give precedence to this volume, which claims its position in the name of its author. Miss Alcott writes excellent books – whether for old or young people – and we know that whatever comes from her pen is adapted to its purpose, and is the best of its kind. “Little Women,” is written in her best vein, and we commend it to our juvenile friends. It is pathetic and amusing, it is full of illustrations, and it is in all respects an excellent book for a juvenile library.

The Galaxy 7.1 (January 1869): 137.

Good books for children are so rare that we welcome one which is so marked an exception to the general rule as Louisa M. Alcott’s “Little Women,” published, with several good illustrations, by Roberts Brothers. The incidents are those of every-day child-life; the talk is natural and childlike; the narrative is lively, and the moral teaching conveyed in a manner to make
a lasting impression on the children who read the book.

([March 1869?]).
Clippings File.

The publication of the second part of Miss Alcott’s popular story is postponed to April 15, as it has been found impossible to get ready the large edition needed by the first of that month. In the meantime the publishers hope to hear from the old lady in the country who is “a reading of it” (the first part) and means to send her opinion “soon’s ever she can stop laughing and crying over it.” The curiosity to learn the denouement of “Little Women” amounts to an epidemic, and one tender-hearted little damsel goes quite beyond the book and wishes to know “where she can find a Laurie, for he just suits her, and she is dying to find just such a delightful boy.” This lad may do as much mischief out of the book as he did in it; a result not contemplated by the author when she drew the character.

The Southern Review 5.10 (April 1869): 474.

This is a book for girls, and is a simple, natural picture of home life. The natural and high-toned, though faulty, characters of the girls, who have scarcely attained to the dignity of heroines, will make this little book about ‘little women’ welcome in many a home. It is, it seems to us, an unmistakable sign of returning health in the taste of the juvenile American, that simple stories like this are in such demand. Let the blessed charge go on; there is still room for improvement.

But why “the inevitable soldier,” or scraps of the late war, in a book about ‘little women’? If it had only been about little men, then, indeed, might an abundant supply of appropriate characters have been found among the heroes of the late war.

Boston Daily Advertiser 113.92 (20 April 1869): [1]:2.

Two books, both decidedly out of the common run, have been published by Roberts Brothers within the past week. These are the second part of Miss Alcott’s Little Women, which in some measure ceases to be a girl’s book and becomes a novel pure and simple as the characters grow to womanhood; and . . .

Miss Alcott’s great success in the branch of literature in which she has recently entered will cause a large class of the public to hail with delight the announcement of Messrs. Roberts Brothers, that they have in press a novel of New England home life from her pen, to be issued during the summer.


The new volume tells something of the grown-up lives of the four girls who grew from childhood into young womanhood in the book which was warmly welcomed
a few months ago. The curtain has risen, as the writer promised, on the second, and probably the last act of the drama of “Little Women” – a drama which brings three young girls to happy homes of their own, and one to a home with

“The spirits risen a while,
Who look back with such a smile.”

The little women who read the book are somewhat disappointed, at first, that Jo and Laurie do not marry, but older ones say, with a smile of calm superiority, that they knew this would not be six months ago, and that if they had taken each other “for better, for worse,” the worse would have been in the ascendant, and that it is better as it is. The noble womanhood which we predicted would rise out of Jo’s chaotic girlhood, comes in time, and Jo is happy with her husband, her children and her school of boys. What more could she have wished? Amy’s yacht sailed over calm waters, under a clear sky; while Jo’s ship goes through a troubled sea, and needs a quick eye and a steady hand at the helm, and her active brain and body find the work which they need.

Meg’s little dove-cote is a pleasant place, none the less home-like because it is small. Her girlish dreams of castles and servants are only dreams, but the house is a home. And gentle Beth walks with the angels. Not content with undermining her constitution in the first volume, and almost killing her with fever, the writer must take her away entirely in the second. The chapter which tells of her sickness and death is very touching, and the verses in memory of her are lovingly written. The few words descriptive of Jo’s story, which “humor and pathos made alive,” recall a certain tale of a “Little Old Shoe” in which, it almost seems to us, lay the germ of the two volumes of “Little Women.”

The great charm of the story lies in its freshness and naturalness. The little women are thorough New Englanders, a little brighter and more original, perhaps, than most girls of their age, but of no more wonderful beauty or intelligence than many whom we daily meet. The book is as truthful as a photograph, and needs no exciting scenes or melodramatic dialogues to make it interesting. It bears marks of carelessness here and there, to be sure, and does not always “hang together,” as boys say, chronologically, for its first page says that the war was over, and a little arithmetic makes “Jo” about nineteen at that time, while in the last chapter she declares herself thin as a shadow, and over thirty. Either Miss Alcott has the gift of second-sight, or Mr. March was a chaplain in the Mexican war. However, the books are so delightful that we are willing to forgive all anachronisms, remembering that Shakspeare himself sometimes was quite at sea as to dates, and facts, and figures.

The volumes are good for girls, because they are free from cant and sham morality. They teach the religion of good works and teach wholesome truths. They are sunny and breezy and full of the abound- ing life which healthy young bodies and minds feel, and which breaks forth in the free speech and manner of the best type of our young men and women – pure, fresh and fearless.

* Does not our correspondent mistake a “Jo”-exaggeration for a statement of sober facts? [Ed. Transcript.]

The Commonwealth 7.31
(24 April 1869): [1]:5.

No reader of Miss Alcott’s Little Women, published some months since by Roberts
Brothers, but will desire to possess the “second part” of the charming sketches which she has just given to the public through the same publishers. The first series was one of the most successful ventures to delineate juvenile womanhood ever attempted; there was a charm and attractiveness, a naturalness and grace, about both characters and narrative, that caused the volume to become a prime favorite with everybody. This issue continues the delight—it is the same fascinating tale, extended without weakening, loading the palate without sickishness. The varied emotions of the young heart are here caught and transfixed so that we almost note the expression of the face upon the printed page. Surely Miss Alcott has wonderful genius for the portraiture, as, years ago, we knew she had for the entertainment, of children.

Boston Sunday Courier
2.21 (25 April 1869): [2]:3.

The second part of this very popular work promises to be as successful as the first. Its style is easy, fresh and natural, and it gives graphic pictures of every-day home life, interspersed with odd and humorous incidents, as well as a dash of romance. The four heroines are brought gracefully out of childhood, and from childish pranks and pleasures they begin to play at something more subtle and sentimental, bearing the stamp and color of real life and its trials, duties and discipline.

Springfield Daily Union

Those who have read part first, to this charming story, will not fail to avail themselves of the first opportunity to obtain this. It is one of those beautiful descriptions of home life, with its mingled scenes of trial and joy that are delightful to read, while it conveys lessons of instruction for all. The confidential intercourse between the mother and her daughters, in which the former makes herself as much the companion and friend as the guide of the latter, is just what should exist in every family, though we fear it does in too few. The lines of the picture are drawn so delicately and naturally, that while it has all the charm of romance it has all the truthfulness and reality of actual life. It is a volume we can most heartily recommend.

Springfield Daily Republican 26.100

In the second part of her Little Women Miss Alcott prolongs the story of the four sisters until three of them are married and one has passed away from earth; and it is told with so much natural vivacity and pathos that it lacks none of the interest of the preceding volume, and will be quite as heartily welcomed. It is very plain that these sketches are drawn from the life, and are to some extent autobiographical; some of the literary experiences of “Jo” being identical with those of Miss Alcott herself, who began authorship very early, and has continued in that career with more than the accustomed helps and hindrances. Her first book—“Flower Fables”—was published fourteen years ago, when she was scarcely out of her teens, in which she wrote it. It met with slight success, and
did not deserve much, but it gave promise of something better to come. Afterwards she wrote for money in the “story newspapers,” with more or less talent, some profit, but little fame. Six years ago she wrote her “Hospital Sketches,” which had a great success, in the newspapers, and when collected by James Redpath in a little volume, from the column of the Commonwealth, for which they were written, had a wide circulation. They were made up from letters written home by Miss Alcott from the Washington hospital where she served as a nurse in 1862–3, until a fever, which nearly proved fatal, ended her nursing and gave others the duty of nursing her. Recovering slowly from this illness, she became a contributor to the Atlantic for awhile, and then published her novel, “Moods,” which was written before the war, and, when printed, and criticized, (as it was, with severity,) no longer represented the thought of the writer, who had advanced to other views and experiences of life. It was reprinted in England after Miss Alcott’s visit there, two or three years ago, where it also got its due share of censure. This whole adventure is touched upon in the fourth chapter of the volume before us, at the end of which Jo says of the criticism, – “I’ve got the joke on my side, after all; for the parts that were taken straight out of real life are denounced as impossible and absurd, and the scenes that I made up out of my own silly head are pronounced ‘charmingly natural, tender, and true.’” Since her European journey Miss Alcott has been as industrious with her pen as her health would permit, and has written and printed a great deal. She abounds in resources and in material, and now that her books have fairly taken hold of the popular heart and fancy, she will find her talents and her industry in demand. She is one of the few writers who are not spoiled by being in fashion; she will now write better than ever, under the gentle stimulus of appreciation, and the public will be the gainer by its own applause.

Boston Post 74.103 (1 May 1869): Sup. [1]:8.

The second part of Miss Alcott’s “Little Women” has created the stir that the success of the first part seemed to render certain. Bright and adroit in her writing and management of the story, the author has taken eminent possession of that domain in fiction on the border line of what pleases the young and what engages the mature.

The Ohio Farmer 38.18 (1 May 1869): 281:3.

All persons who have read the first part of these pleasant sketches of the four little women above named, will not fail to follow the story in this volume, which, in the author’s best view, goes on with the heroines through divers domestic, artistic and literary experiences; also, tender troubles; girl secrets; surprises; gossip; new impressions, etc., etc. We should say this is a specimen of juicy and healthy young lady reading.


The second part of this charming story is out, and all who followed the four
sisters and their brother-friend through their childish years, will be eager to follow their various experiences through maidenhood, in college, abroad, and later, in the new home centres they all, save one, helped to make. It would not be fair to those who will read the book, and whose eyes may fall upon this notice to tell any of the story. It is enough to say that the second part perfectly fulfills the promise of the first, and one leaves it with the sincere wish that there were to be a third and a fourth part; indeed he wishes he need never part company, with these earnest, delightful people.

One thought ought to be sown broadcast, till it supplants the heresy that “boys must have wild oats to sow,” with the truth that purity and virtue are not less the birthright of the brother than of the sister. Of Laurie she says “The poor fellow had temptations enough from without and from within, but he withstood them pretty well . . .” [Remainder of 2 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

Miss Alcott could crave no richer harvest than that which is sure to come from her sowing. Thousands of young people will read her story of these healthy, happy homes, and their standard of home and happiness must in many cases be raised. This is a blessed thing to accomplish in these days of extravagance, when the highest ideal of home is more and more seldom realized.

I have been reading the second part of Miss Alcott’s “Little Woman [Women],” and it strikes me as a very clever book indeed. She is brilliant, witty, has remarkable descriptive powers, and is as eminently successful in collating the sympathies of the reader as almost any writer that we now have. Her books are full of heart, if I may use a hackneyed [hackneyed] and perhaps somewhat indefinite, but still expressive phrase to many. I don’t see why fame is not before her now. Her novel “Mood [Moods]” never had full justice done it. There are chapters in it of the first order of ability, though in other parts it is obviously open to exception. She is evidently thinking of this work when she puts into “Jo’s” mouth the comments on her novel. Miss Alcott has been long well-known among the literary women of advanced thought in this vicinity. She is self reliant, and has much vivacity of temperament. As an amateur actress she has shown considerable talent, appearing often in aid of war charities while the Rebellion was in progress. Like several other Boston authors who have won fame, she began by writing for story-papers.

The Daily American

Part Second of Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s Little Women, or Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, has been issued in the neat style of the preceding [preceding] volume, and the story is continued with all the freshness and vivacity which charmed so many readers in the previous volume. The fact that the author has woven with these sketches somewhat of her own experience, will give them an additional interest, and add to the zest with which they will be perused.

In the fourth chapter of this work, Miss Alcott very charmingly narrates an incident in the early authorship of “Jo” which we more than suspect she largely copied from the pages of her own memory; the trials, hopes, disappointments, and rewards of first literary ventures; the result of advice and criticism, the mutilation of her story; the vexations and the triumphs, are most clearly told, while, as she says of the critics, “I’ve got the joke on my side, after all; ... [remainder of sentence omitted].” Miss Alcott writes with great pathos and vivacity, and the freshness and purity of her style, gives her books a strong hold on the popular heart.


Those who read Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s “Little Women” will gladly welcome its Part Second, which is issued by Roberts & Brothers, Boston. Here we have the story of those delightful “little women” continued till they all have homes of their own, though dear, home-loving Beth finds hers in no earthly mansion. Miss Alcott premises that the elders may think there is too much “lovering” in this story; and we might be tempted to complain of it on that score if all the love-making in it were not the most natural thing in the world. Still we cannot help feeling a tenderness of regard for Part First, for the girls before they reached young ladyhood, and for Jo before her hair grew out again. Sundry scenes in Meg’s married life are told charmingly – the quarrel when John brought home company unexpectedly upon currant-jelly day, and “Denie” disciplined by “parpar,” whilst the story of Beth’s entrance into the Shadow-land, and how Jo sorrowed and was comforted for her in her father’s study, which she was used to call “the church of one member,” must have been written from the author’s own life, or it could not touch the hearts of her readers so closely. “Little Women,” in both parts, is an exceedingly captivating story, whose like we shall hardly see again till Miss Alcott writes the history of Jo’s “boys.”


The second part of Little Women is a capital ending of a capital story, by Louise M. Alcott, who has shown in her work a fine perception of the fine elements and instincts of human nature, a shrewd Yankee common sense and clearness of observation, and considerable artistic skill in the development of her characters and the working out of her plot. Her Little Women will be favorites everywhere.

The Nation 8.203 (20 May 1869): 400.

Miss Alcott’s literary success seems to be very like that achieved by her favorite, “Jo,” in this pleasant little story. She has not endangered her popularity by any excessive refinement, nor by too hard a struggle after ideal excellence in her work. Her book is just such a hearty, unaffected, and “genial” description of family life as will appeal to the majority of average readers, and is as certain to attain a kind of success which is apt enough fatally to endanger
its author’s pretensions to do better work in future. Meantime, “Little Women” is entertaining reading, and, as far as its moral lesson goes, may safely be put into the hands of young people, and will be likely, too, to give their elders a certain pleasure.

**Zion’s Herald 46.20**  

*Little Women*, by Miss Alcott (Roberts Bros.) continues the former story, and improves upon it. She takes her girls abroad, and sends one of them to heaven. The story of “Beth’s” death is sweetly and pathetically told, though no future life fills the dying talks. Considering the exceedingly anti-evangelical atmosphere in which the writer has been educated, it becomes almost Christian. She makes “Pilgrim’s Progress” the favorite book of the dying girl, though she has no Bible around, and no holy, Christly communings. Never once is the Lord’s name mentioned. The “Pilgrim’s Progress” gives a semi-saintly lustre to the scene, though fainter than it would have been had the Word of God been a lamp unto her feet, and a light unto her path. Her life goes out “with no farewell, but one loving look, and a little sigh.” How far below the exultations of a Christian death-bed. She says, “Seldom, except in books, do the dying utter memorable words, see visions, or depart with beatified countenances.” Not so. Our “Righteous Dead” weekly disproves this statement. The Christian death-bed, over the land, almost hourly answers it. It shows the contrast between faith in Christ and Nirwana, and how dark are many death-beds in New England through the eclipse of faith.

**Providence Daily Journal**  
40.126 (28 May 1869): [5]:2.

The second volume of Miss Alcott’s story is like its predecessor, full of vivacity, pathos and absorbing interest. It continues the history of the four sisters until three of them are married, and one passes away in the common lot of death. Like a novel it is marked by singular coincidents, but it bears also the signs of an experience drawn from the actual life. Whether it be fiction or reality, it is a natural story, and the desire manifested by youthful readers to see its conclusion is the best evidence that it is a truthful narrative and one that appeals directly to the heart.

**Eclectic Magazine n.s. 9.6**  
(June 1869): 757.

Miss Alcott is a writer of great ability. The field which she has chosen is unfortunately not yet held in the estimation which it deserves, though its importance is gradually being recognized; but we doubt if any book in American literature of recent date contains more freshness and originality, nicer or more vigorous delineations of character, a more skilful handling of the emotions and sentiments, or a finer sense of the humorous than “Little Women,” Part I. of which appeared about a year ago, and of which the present is the concluding volume. There is material enough in them to furnish forth liberally some half dozen series of children’s libraries, and their tone and temper is of that rare kind which only rare minds and cultivation can produce.
It is like catching a glimpse of a varied and beautiful landscape after the confinement, clamor, and dust of railway travel, to turn these leaves after slumbering through the books of superlative perfections which are the pride of Sunday-school libraries and the bane of youthful readers.

“Little Women” is the very best of books to reach the hearts of the young of any age from six to sixty, though its merits will be most appreciated by those who have reached the contemplative period of life. Here lies its weakness (weakness only in that it is designed for children). It is far too intellectual to delight the souls of those who revel in “Robinson Crusoe,” the “Arabian Nights,” and the “Swiss Family Robinson.” Such preternatural cleverness never was and never will be exhibited by children, as those which “Little Women” presents to us; but it is well for the little women of real life to have such ideals familiar to their imaginations.

That Miss Alcott will produce work of a higher order we have not a doubt; that “Little Women” does not evince the maturity of her powers the book itself, despite its great merits, is clear evidence.

Her characters, though drawn in a masterly manner, are a little too typical, clever, and (if we may so speak) natural; the humor is a little too humorous, and the author has retained for them the simplicity and artlessness of childhood to an age far beyond what we can accept as probable in life as it is to-day. We should not speak of these minor defects did we not feel that the book is not an ordinary book nor the author an ordinary writer. We hope to meet Miss Alcott hereafter in a far higher, or at least a less limited field, when the little conventionalities of the present are laid aside and her manner is as unerring as her perceptions.

One altogether unnecessary digression we noticed with regret. Surely the flinging at critics is beneath the dignity of Miss Alcott’s really great talents. Besides, is it not a little old? When original it may have been passable, but since Miss Evans and every one else who lugs in a character given to inking fingers for the press have used it, it has become just a little thin; has, in fact, passed into what we may call joint-stock sarcasm. If one goes to the provincial press for criticism he will doubtless find enough to sneer at – we read the other day in an exchange that “Mrs. Southworth is beyond all doubt the greatest female novelist of this or any other age” – but there are certain known mediums in which few books ever fail to get their just due, in which at least the aimlessness, futility, and contradictions which the author gives us to understand are typical, are never found.

Miss Alcott is justly a great favorite with young readers, and her “Little Women,” in both its parts, strikes us as one of the best of her many productions. It is really a charming story, thoroughly natural, fresh and full of interest. It will delight and improve the class to whom it is specially addressed.

The second volume of Miss Alcott’s “Little Women” is simply one of the most
charming little books that have fallen into our hands for many a day. A better antidote for “Problematic Characters” could hardly be found. There is just enough of sadness in it to make it true to life, while it is so full of honest work and whole-souled fun, paints so lively a picture of a home in which contentment, energy, high spirits, and real goodness make up for the lack of money, that it will do good wherever it finds its way. It is, we must admit, a “breezy” book; Miss Alcott could hardly write, if she tried, in the quietly decorous vein; but its breeziness is as bracing as that of the pine woods. No one of any taste can read it without keen enjoyment; few will read it without lasting profit.


We remember, years ago, “in war time,” reading a little pamphlet entitled “Hospital Sketches,” written with great humor and pathos, and, therefore, we took up the first volume of “Little Women” with a pleasant feeling of acquaintance with the author. This feeling grew into a hearty friendship, by the time we had finished the second part.

Miss Alcott has the enviable faculty of making her characters say and do just what they really would have said and done, were they real personages. It has been hinted that it was a story of actual life, and we should feel that our favorite “Jo” must have been drawn from the author’s personal experiences, were it not so difficult to tell one’s own story with the vivid naturalness with which this one is told. It is amusing to see with how much spirit this simple little book is discussed by elderly people who generally look upon young folks’ story-books as foolish things, at the best. We have known one grave lady take Jo’s refusal of Laurie more to heart than that young gentleman, for he got over it, and our friend has not yet ceased grumbling!

“Little Women,” with its truthful pictures of girlish joys and sorrows, of homely sports and labors, of womanly loves and cares, will be dearly loved by all youthful readers, and warmly appreciated by wiser heads. We hope the wonderful success with which it has been met, – we saw the publisher’s notice of the fourteenth thousand some weeks ago, – will encourage Miss Alcott to make another attempt in the same direction.


This is a charming story, full of life, full of fun, full of human nature, and therefore full of interest. The little women play at being pilgrims when they are children, and resolve to be true pilgrims as they grow older. Life to them was earnest; it had its duties, and they did not overlook them or despise them. Directed by the wise teachings and beautiful example of a good mother, they became in the end true and noble women. Make their acquaintance; for Amy will be found delightful, Beth very lovely, Meg beautiful[,] and Jo splendid;
that there is a real Jo somewhere we have not the slightest doubt.


Miss Alcott’s dear “Little Women,” Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy, are already bosom friends to hundreds of other little women, who find in their experiences the very mirror of their own lives. In Part First we find them four natural, sweet girls, with well-defined characters, which, in Part Second, are developed to womanhood through such truthful and lifelike scenes as prove Miss Alcott to be a faithful student of nature. It isn’t *à la mode* now to be moved over stories, but we pity the reader who can repress a few tears as well as many hearty laughs over the lives of these little women. We are glad to hear that Miss Alcott is to give us some “Little Men,” too. She has struck a vein that will bear working.


*Little Women*, Part II., by Louise M. Alcott, is a rather mature book for the little women, but a capital one for their elders. It is natural, and free from that false sentiment which pervades too much of juvenile literature. Autobiographies, if genuine, are generally interesting, and it is shrewdly suspected that Joe’s experience as an author photographs some of Miss Alcott’s own literary mistakes and misadventures. But do not her children grow rather rapidly? They are little children in Part First, at the breaking out of the civil war. They are married, settled, and with two or three children of their own before they get through Part Second.


The second part of Louisa M. Alcott’s domestic study, *Little Women; or, Meg, Jo, Beth and May* [Amy], is issued by Roberts Brothers, Boston. Miss Alcott’s work is always that of a thoughtful and cultured woman, and shows delicate feeling and taste. There is, perhaps, a slight dullness, or lack of interesting action, in the progress of the present tale.


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Miss Alcott is a very sprightly writer, fresh and truthful to nature and character, producing books that are sufficiently entertaining to sustain the interest of those who feel they have the time to read them.
It is late to speak of “Little Women,” the second part of which has appeared. Few can help getting interested in “Jo,” and her grown-up history. Everything about the story is “as natural as life.”

This is a cheerful domestic story, which appears to be written for the especial use and behoof of the fair sex, as it deals with the gradual development of character which takes place in the four young heroines, whose earlier years have been described in a previous work. The scene is in the United States; and our fair country women will find here portrayed a state of society to which they are utterly unaccustomed, although at the same time the book abounds with touches of human nature and traits of character which are common to all the world. Probably (but we speak on such topics with diffidence) there is something very lifelike in Miss Jo’s confession, some time after refusing an offer of marriage, that perhaps if Teddy had tried again she might have said “Yes,” – not because she loved him any more, but because she cared more to be loved, than when he went away. But Teddy has now found elsewhere the haven of rest which Jo denied him, and Jo has to content herself with the gift of an awakened but, as yet, unsatisfied heart. It is almost needless to say that Miss Jo is one of the strong-minded race of young women, and that she has started in life with the fallacious idea that a man’s love is by no means essential to a woman’s happiness. Now she has found out her mistake, and deigns to make confession to her mother, who congratulates her on her progress in natural feelings. “I’m glad of that, Jo,” says the calm but sympathising parent, “for it shows that you are getting on. There are plenty to love you, so try to be satisfied with father and mother, sisters and brothers, friends and babies, till the best lover of all comes to give you your reward.” Jo takes the advice very kindly, but assures her mother that her heart has become so elastic lately that it cannot be properly filled, as of yore, with family affections. “I used to be quite contented with my family; I don’t understand it,” says poor Jo. “I do,” says her mother, with a meaning smile. This seems all very pretty and sensible; and it is a fact, we believe, that young ladies do sometimes get confidential with their mammas on these subjects, when softened by a little disappointment. Miss Jo in her early days aspires to literary success; the other sisters, one artistic, one consumptive, and so on, follow out their several destinies, and most of them get “settled” in due time, though not, so to speak, according to the “first intention.” There is a good deal of innocent fun in the book, and there is no lack of quaint Transatlantic expressions and turns of thought: – “She never broke her word, and was much exercised in her mind how to get round it” – “You must promise not to cut up any pranks” – “Don’t be a peacock: I only moaned a trifle just to keep the other girls company” – “I don’t wish to get raspy, so let’s change the subject.” No wonder that young Mr. Lawrence, the hero, gives up all thought
of Jo (the individual who doesn’t wish to “get raspy”), and seeks happiness with the gentle Amy, who vows that she is prouder of her handsome husband than of all his money, and addresses him with the tender words, “Don’t laugh – but your nose is such a comfort to me”! The reader will find more truth and more humour in this story than in many works of fiction of a more pretentious character.

Boston Daily Advertiser. Quoted in advertisement ([1869?]). Clippings File.

A Book which any woman might be proud of having written, and which is rich in promise as well as performance.

C. “Little Women.” [Massachusetts newspaper?] ([1869?]). Clippings File.

A pure pleasure rewards the author of a successful book, and we think that in Miss Alcott’s heart a grateful thanksgiving must rise for the appreciation and tender interest which cluster around the lives of her “Little Women.” It is its versatility, its naturalness, its purity, its loving affection, its human frailty, its oft-repeated yielding to temptation, its struggles against besetting sin, and the blending of the varying elements in a healthy growth that gives “Little Women” its power to charm, its absorbing interest to all the young people who read it, and who bear their testimony with beaming eyes and happy faces to the success of the author. “Have you read ‘Little Women?’” is the oft-repeated inquiry. And the answer to the common question, “Tell me something to read!” is, “Read ‘Little Women.’” “I have read it a dozen times and mean to read it over again.” “It is splendid, bewitching,” and so on, say the readers, until the superlatives of the language are exhausted, but not their admiration.

Thus fell the curtain in the drama of Part First, and now to the joy of the little folks Part Second has succeeded, in which, with the same fresh and life-like power, the heroines, now “Little Women” no longer, play their parts in the second act of the drama, where Meg illustrates the happiness of a peaceful domestic life; Spiritual [spiritual] Beth goes to live with the angels; Amy develops into a beauty, and marries Laurie, the hero; and brave, gifted Jo settles down with her Professor to poverty and bliss in the great house where she spends her superfluous energy in training unruly boys. We do not feel quite satisfied with her destiny, and think that in some way she ought to have married Laurie, and after her self-denying exertions for others, had a little larger portion of this world’s goods fall to her share.

We find it difficult to imagine anything prettier than the tableau of apple-gatherers at the close of the volume. There is a beautiful blending of different characters in one harmonious whole in the members of the group gathered around the loving mother and long-tried friend. It is her influence which has moulded them; her tender care which has guided them; her fostering hand, which has left its impress upon them; and made them, in happy union, blessing and being blest, surround with grateful love her declining years, and reward a thousand-fold the judicious training and devotion bestowed upon their happy childhood.
We leave the Second Part unsatisfied, and wish we might know the destiny of the children of our heroines, brought up under such loving influences, – the petted twins, Daisy and Demi; frail little Beth [Bess], and uproarious Fritz and Teddy.

Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy are no strangers. We have met them before, when they were young girls, in a volume of the same title, being the first part of Mrs. Abbott’s [Miss Alcott’s] work. Part second begins with the heroines budding into womanhood. Meg is soon [soon] married; and Jo – well you must read the book through to find out what becomes of her. We could not wish the society of a more genial, unassuming, lively, mischievous quartette, than the four heroines of this domestic story. Rippling, dancing, smiling, laughing – yet sensible, wise, discreet. It is no wonder that the old fogies who believe in home life as the centre of the world, and all else but as its necessary auxiliaries, should delight in them.

Roberts Brothers, Boston, have just published part second of “Little Women,” by Miss Louisa M. Alcott, which, with the preceding part, gives an interesting account of the home life and pursuits of “Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy.” These volumes have attracted great attention, not only among the little people for whom they were written, but also among children of a larger growth. Miss Alcott’s tales are decidedly superior to the ordinary juvenile stories, and enjoy a well deserved reputation.

The first part of this story, traced the growth and training of a family of four daughters, under a most healthful regimen, and the second describes their womanhood. The father is a pureminded, scholarly clergyman, the mother a brisk, cheery woman, and the daughters, frank, true, intelligent and loving. Given this state of things, what sort of traits and life should characterize their womanhood, is the problem which Miss Alcott undertakes to solve. She does it beautifully, although it is in the simplest style, without a sensational line, or an overwrought picture. It tells of weddings of course, for it is a picture of home and family life; but of trials, strugglings, sickness, death, faith and victory as well, for these too come to our homes. The volume exhibits the reaping as the first did the sowing. – The two might well be labeled, “Home Training and its Recompense.”

All who read “Little Women,” by Louisa M. Alcott, will receive with pleasure the
announcement of a second volume from Roberts Brothers. In this the lives of Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy are followed out into the years of their maturity. The same freshness and sparkle pervades these pages that gave such a charm to the previous volume, and the interest in the narrative is not diminished by a general belief (and well founded, too, we understand) that Miss Alcott has not drawn altogether upon her imagination. As a specimen of the tender and touching side of the book, we quote from the description of the entrance of Beth, the peacemaker, into “the valley of the shadow”:

One night when Beth turned the leaves of her old favorite “Pilgrim’s Progress” she found a little paper scribbled over, in Jo’s hand. [Remainder of 6 quoted paragraphs and 5 stanzas of “My Beth” omitted.]

The volume will be generally welcomed, as among the most delightful of current publications.

[Philadelphia newspaper?] ([1869]). Clippings File.

Miss Alcott is very favorably known as the authoress of “Mood [Moods],” one of the best American novels we have seen for a long time. Lately she seems to have turned her attention to writing for children, and her efforts have proved quite successful, the first series of “Little Women” having passed through a number of editions and become very popular, as it deserved to be, for it was a charming book. The present volume (second series) however, surpasses it. The fortunes of Meg, Jo, Belt [Beth] and Amy, as well as that interesting young gentleman Lawrie, are pursued, but, the girls having become young ladies, their childish pranks have ceased, and a graceful love story is woven. The narrative takes place principally in Europe, where the “little women” are traveling, and the book is more suited to children of a larger growth than those who enjoyed Meg and Jo, and the other characters when they were more juvenile. The story is so delightfully told, with such ease and effect, that we are rejoiced to learn that Miss Alcott is engaged upon a story of New England life, which intelligence will be exceedingly satisfactory to this admirable writer’s many admirers.

[Pittsburgh Gazette?] ([1869?]). Clippings File.

Those who were fortunate enough to read Miss Alcott’s “Little Women,” will gladly welcome Part Second, which has just appeared. No better evidence of the popularity of Part First could be given than the general desire to see the second. This volume is a continuation of the story of these “Little Women” until they enter womanhood, and have houses of their own. There is a quiet vein of humor pervading it, even amid the narrative of the stern duties of life. Phases of their lives, especially of Meg’s married life, are narrated in charming style. The story is also tinged with sorrow, because of the death of Beth, who is translated to a better home, than either Meg or Jo enjoyed. Perhaps Miss Alcott will gratify her admirers with a history of Jo’s boys. We are assured she is now engaged on a work of actual experience, to form one of the capital “Handy Volume” series.
We noticed a year ago the first part of this charming book. Since that time the public has ratified the verdict of the critics. The story of Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy is in thousands of households, and the call for a sequel to their early life was very loud. Miss Alcott has gratified the universal desire, and the second part is worthy of the first. The children are girls and women here. Jo becomes an authoress, and marries a professor. Meg and Amy are matrons, too, when the book closes, and pure-hearted little Beth has gone from the family circle. No commendation of the story is needed. It will be a favorite with hundreds of children these holidays.


Here we have an excellent description of American family life among the poorer gentry. A sensible conscientious principle pervades the story, and there is great originality in the chief characters, whose sayings and doings are described with much humour and appreciation. The first part contains the history of the four Little Women with their mother, during the absence of the father, who is serving as chaplain of the forces in the late American War.

Margaret or Meg, is a pretty amiable girl of sixteen. Jo, the second daughter, and genius of the family, is a fine high spirited girl of fifteen at the time the story commences. Beth is a tender-hearted and delicate creature, very conscientious and very shy, while Amy is a child of twelve, whose character is developed further on.

Mrs. March, the mother, is a sensible, self-denying woman and loving mother, who, by her good example and ready sympathy, points out and leads them the way in which they should go, without much admonition or laying down of laws. This plan of dealing with her daughters seems to answer very well; the girls go on in their own way with their various duties, and whenever a misfortune or a fault occurs, invariably bring their difficulty to their mother to set it to rights, and receive their due meed of praise or blame.

One day when they were complaining of their hard lots, for the family had suffered a great reverse of fortune, Mrs. March asks them if they remember the time when they used to play at “Pilgrims.”

“Yes,” said Jo, “what fun it was, especially going by the Lions, fighting Apollyon, and passing through the Valley of Humiliation.” [Remainder of 6 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

They all agree to set out on the Pilgrimage: Jo first saying that they ought to have a roll of directions, like Christian.

“Look under your pillows Christmas morning and you will each find your Guide-book,” replies the mother. They found, and studied it.

Then follows their various trials and failures. Meg goes to Vanity Fair, and after “fessing” to mother and Jo, is rather the better than the worse for her experiences. Jo meets Apollyon, and has a terrible fall, without making quite such a fight for it as we might have expected from her. Amy descends into the Valley of Humiliation; and further on in the history, while Mrs. March is absent with her sick husband, Beth performs an act of duty, noble in
its unflinching conscientiousness, but done with such humility and simplicity that it seems to happen as part of her everyday work. “Little Faithful,” however, falls sick in consequence, and seems to be on her dying bed; dark days close in on them; but Mrs. March is sent for, Beth recovers, and “good times” come back once more.

Jo., the most interesting of the sisters, is an authoress. She is clever and persevering, and though full of fun, has an ardent desire to do what is right. She has a favourite friend, a boy, whose well-being she considers it her special mission to look after. There are some good scenes between these two. Laurie, of course, falls in love with his friend. His visits to Meg’s cottage, and a chapter on Morning Calls, are very humourously and entertainingly described.

In comparing this book with those of some other American authoresses of the same type, we think that Miss Alcott surpasses many, surpasses many, because she interests her readers quite as much, and entertains them a great deal more. It would be difficult however, to compare this story and “An Old-fashioned Girl,” also by Miss Alcott, with Miss Phelps’ “Gates Ajar,” because the latter book is entirely devoted to one subject – a contemplation of what Heaven will be like. In Mrs. Whitney’s beautiful portrayal of “Faith Gartney,” the same earnest spirit and conscientiousness are shown, and it is written in a superior style; more, perhaps, after the manner of our own Miss Yonge or Miss Sewell. Miss Alcott’s characters are more commonplace, more lifelike, and more varied. They have as much purpose and resolve, and are more entertaining and witty; but she is mistaken in making her young heroines – who certainly are ladies in action and principle – express themselves in such an unpleasing style. Amy, who aims at being elegant, comes home one day, and in describing the troubles of her schoolfellows, says, “She cried quarts, I know she did;” and they all speak after a fashion most inferior to their education and training. This adds nothing to the amusement of the reader, nor is it a failing common to all American fictionists, for Miss Phelps and Mrs. Whitney are both free from it, as also is Mrs. Wetherell. In her delightful stories of “Queechy,” and the “Wide, Wide World,” she makes only the uneducated speak after the fashion of uneducated people. We like children’s words to come from children’s mouths, and should lose all pleasure in hearing the young describe their delights or troubles in the style of a lecture or a poem, but Miss Alcott’s book would be quite as interesting and amusing if her good “Little Women” expressed themselves in more lady-like language.

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Whether Miss Alcott is the most popular of American writers for young people we do not know; but beyond all question, ‘Little Women’ is just now the most popular American juvenile fiction. You see it upon every American book-stall, and find it in almost every American home. It is having a greater run than any recent fiction; and it is really a very charming story. The ‘Little Women’[sic] are the four children of Mr. March, an American pastor, away South at the war. Their characters are delineated, and their history, from early girlhood to motherhood, traced with a consummate cleverness. Miss Alcott has not, perhaps, so delicate a touch as the author of the ‘Gayworthy’s,’ nor so
graphic a power as Mrs. Beecher Stowe; but she has delicacy, descriptive power, and force of no ordinary kind. One of the most promising characteristics of American fiction is its individuality. There is a marked family likeness among the fictions by female writers, which during the last few years have obtained such popularity among ourselves. They are redolent of American character and life, especially of New England life, and have also an intellectual cast of their own—a kind of household idealism, quaintness, and piety, not easy to describe, but unmistakably to be recognised. We predict for ‘Little Women’ a popularity greater than that of the ‘Wide, Wide World,’ ‘The Gayworthy’s,’ or ‘Faith Gartney’s Childhood.’ We are not sure that our American cousins do not, in this department of literature, far excel any writer that we can boast. There are two or three other books of Miss Alcott’s (‘The Old-Fashioned Girl,’ for instance) with which we should like English children to be acquainted, although they are not quite equal to ‘Little Women.’

Excerpt from “Roberts Brothers, Boston.”
American Literary Gazette 17.5 (1 July 1871): 118.

Passing over without mention several books, we come to October, 1868, a month marked with a white stone in the annals of this house. In that month, the first volume of Miss Alcott’s “Little Women” was published, of which work eighty thousand copies have been sold. Prior to its publication, Miss Alcott was comparatively unknown in literature; she had written one or two books, which had not proved successful, and sundry bright and readable magazine papers; but the country at large knew little of her as a writer. She desired to put some of these magazine papers into book-form, and proposed to Roberts Brothers that they should publish them. Mr. Niles, on behalf of the firm, declined to do so, but expressed the wish that Miss Alcott would write a book for the house, stipulating that it should be a “domestic novel.” She at once consented to undertake the task, and the result of her efforts was “Little Women.” The success of this book is matter of history. It was followed within a year by “An Old-Fashioned Girl,” of which forty-five thousand copies have been sold, and by “Hospital Sketches,” a collection of magazine pieces, which has reached a sale of five thousand. “Little Men,” her last book, was published on the first of last month (June), and up to the 24th thirty-six thousand copies of it had been sold. Here we have an aggregate of one hundred and sixty-six thousand volumes—or, leaving out “Hospital Sketches,” one hundred and sixty-one thousand volumes, representing only three works, by one author, and all published within a period of less than three years. This success has few parallels, or none, all things considered, in American literature.


We regard these volumes as two of the most fascinating that ever came into a household. Old and young read them with the same eagerness. Lifelike in all their
delineations of time, place, and character, they are not only intensely interesting, but full of a cheerful morality, that makes them healthy reading for both fireside and the Sunday school. We think we love “Jo” a little better than all the rest, her genius is so happy tempered with affection.

The Literary World 4.1 (1 June 1873): 16.

We have been favored with the privilege of reading and printing the following extract from a letter written by Miss May Alcott, now in England. It tells a very pleasant little anecdote, and is an interesting evidence of the kindly feeling of English readers toward the author of “Little Women,” and the increasing popularity of her books among them. Her new novel, “Work,” will be published in England almost simultaneously with its appearance here; being issued there in two editions, two and one volumes.

“In the train from Liverpool I met a pretty young English girl, and we naturally fell to talking about books. When I spoke of Dickens, and how well he was known and loved on our side of the water, my companion said: ‘You are not more familiar with English novels than we with American ones. Just now our favorite is a Miss Alcott, who writes the most charming books I ever read. I have an intense desire to take her by the hand and tell her how much we admire and love her stories, and how eagerly we look for anything new from her pen.’ Much pleased with her praise, and much amused at the joke, I replied: ‘What do you find to like in the books? I should think they were too American to please you.’ ‘Oh no! we have known and liked many of your countrymen and women, and so can understand and make allowance for the greater freedom you enjoy in many ways. The stories are so true and natural and good, with a moral so sweetly slipped in somewhere, that one cannot help loving them heartily. Papa was so carried away by them that at Christmas he bought many copies to give away, as the most valuable and enjoyable gift he could find.’ Then I told her who I was, and the pretty girl was so surprised and pleased, she blushed and smiled, and asked questions till I was ashamed to talk about my family any more.”


The reputation of Miss Louisa M. Alcott is on the increase in Europe. Her books have been translated and published in France and Germany with much of the enthusiasm they elicited in England. We copy below two favorable notices from recent French journals!

We not only seek books for the use of parents, but for the amusement and instruction of children, and all mothers should know of the “Little Women” of Miss Alcott, translated by Madame Rémy of Lousanne [Lausanne], with the taste and intelligence which fits it for a youthful public.
Nothing is more difficult than to write well for children. The greatest of our contemporary masters have tried without success. Only the English and Americans offer models of this sort. Read “Little Women” and judge how far French books are from speaking a true language to the little creatures, who are in the sum of humanity seen through the large end of the lorgnette. [Constitutionnel.

“Little Women, translated with permission of the author by Madame Rémy; Lausanne.”

What a charming book! says many a reader on arriving at the last page of the volume we announce. And what then renders it so interesting? A mother and her four girls, who struggle against the difficulties of a position approaching poverty, while the father, who is nearly ruined to save the honor of a friend, fights the enemies of his country. There are unhappy neighbors to be helped, solitary friends to be cheered, a disagreeable old aunt to be served, many worldly temptations to be resisted, and a young tutor who in the end becomes a lover.

There seems nothing here very new or very touching. No, but the four little women called Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, are more original, more spirituel and amiable than those one generally finds in Europe. They are true Americans. They have their faults, without doubt, and they do many droll things, but they are so brave in their small battles that one takes part with them, and one triumphs with them when they overcome their enemies, vanity, envy, selfishness and anger. Read, children, large and small, and let this story awaken in you the desire to achieve also this beautiful victory. [Union Jurassienne, Nov. 30, 1872.


And here at the end of our notice of English novels for this quarter let us call attention to some reprints of novels from other quarters. Miss Alcott’s are to our fancy the best. The Americans often complain that they have no good novels, because it does not pay to write them when English stories can be reprinted so cheap. We consider Miss Alcott’s stories to be far better in every way than the generality of English tales. They abound in humour and fancy. The most prudish, too, may read them without the slightest misgiving. We have no doubt that they will be as popular in England as they are in America.


Two of my sisters and myself have taken your magazine ever since it was published, and like it very much. I am glad Miss Louisa M. Alcott is writing a story for your magazine, as I am very fond of her stories. I have read "Eight Cousins," "Rose in Bloom," "Little Men," "Hospital Sketches," "Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag," and "Little Women," with all of which I was delighted. I have three sisters, who, with myself, have been called "Meg, Amy, Beth and Jo." My oldest sister, Alice, who is twenty
years old, has been called “Meg”; my sister Ada, who is sixteen years old, is the “Amy” of our family; my little sister Stella, who is eleven years old, is well skilled in music, and we think she is very much like “Beth”; and I am thirteen, and have been called “Jo.”

So, you see, I was greatly interested in “Little Women,” as I could appreciate it so well; and it seemed to me as if Miss Alcott must have seen us four girls before she wrote the story.

I have four first cousins, and they are all boys, and with my sisters and me we are “eight cousins.” One of my cousins is a little baby, a little over five weeks old. He makes the eighth cousin.

I liked the piece about Miss Alcott in the December number very much. We expect to take your magazine until we are young women. I think it the best published for young people.


Everybody has read “Little Women,” the most delightful of all Miss Alcott’s delightful books; nearly everybody, that is, for there are, we know, a fortunate few who have that pleasure to come – a pleasure that will be doubled if it can be read in the form in which its publishers have clothed it for the holidays. Fancy an elegant quarto volume of nearly six hundred pages, printed with exquisite clearness on the finest tinted paper, with nearly two hundred artistic illustrations, drawn and engraved expressly for it, and think what an amount of happiness it represents to the little women all over the country for whom it was written, every one of whom ought to have it. One of the particular attractions of the edition, aside from the text, is the portrait of Miss Alcott – something which has never before found place in any of her books, much to the disappointment of her admirers. The designs are all from the skilful pencil of Mr. F. T. Merrill, and were all drawn, engraved and printed under the supervision of George T. Andrew. Altogether, in form and character, no more beautiful or appropriate presentation book for girl readers has ever been put into the holiday market.
An illustrated edition of so popular a work as Miss Alcott’s “Little Women” could not fail to be a conspicuous feature of the holiday season. The designs are two hundred in number, and are in a high degree characteristic and beautiful. Rarely have the conceptions of art and literature more effectively and harmoniously reinforced each other. The appearance of the book is in every way creditable to the publishers, Roberts Brothers.

Among the very beautiful books for the holidays – a family gift to the young and to the maturer also – is the illustrated quarto edition of Little Women, by Louisa M. Alcott. It is the volume that gave this charming writer her reputation, and has ensured the large sale of every succeeding publication from her pen. This is a very attractive book, every way; its paper, its print, its illustrations – especially the thoughtful and kindly face of the author – and its tasteful binding.

A very beautiful holiday volume of a quiet and refined type has been made out of Miss Alcott’s Little Women, by putting its two parts together into a small quarto of 586 pages, with cover of green and gilt and gold, and golden edges, a delicately tinted paper, a singularly clear-faced type, and an abundance of pictures. The pictures, nearly two hundred in number, are all the designs of Frank T. Merrill, and were drawn, engraved, and printed under the supervision of George T. Andrew; and are conceived in such a sympathetic spirit, and are so clever and effective that they suffice to tell the story almost as engagingly as the text itself. It is rarely the case, we think, that an illustrator enters so heartily into the work of an author, and, while following its moods so deferentially, supports and carries them out with such a tender grace. They show inequalities, and here and there a touch of stiffness; but in the main they are admirable, full of animation and expression; and some of them, such as the sleeping cherubs on p. 479, the group on p. 362, and the disconsolate Cupid on p. 447, could hardly be excelled. The latter is one of many dainty vignettes and tail-pieces; and the girl figures throughout are so especially natural and spirited that one might wonder whether “Frank” T. Merrill were not one of the fair sex himself, and so to the manner born. The portrait of Miss Alcott is good.

About a dozen years ago, a book for boys and girls made its advent in the literary world. It came unheralded, like a bright new star that suddenly flashes in the sky.
No one, least of all, its author, dreamed of the sensation it would create. Children read the book with absorbed attention and pronounced it “splendid;” they told other children, and thus the ball rolled on. The book was “Little Women,” and in a short time, it found entrance as an honored guest in thousands of homes all over the country, winning fame wherever there were children to enjoy its bright pictures, and laugh over its jolly scenes. Then it crossed the ocean, and its progress was only stopped when it had circumnavigated the world. The next year, another volume appeared, continuing the story. This, though not the equal of the first volume in vivacity and originality, was eagerly read, and happy were the young people who numbered the two volumes among their choice possessions. But the boys and girls who first read “Little Women,” are now men and women, and while a new generation has been growing up to take their place, the memory of this fascinating [fascinating] story has become a little dim. The publishers have therefore renewed its youth in the most delightful manner possible. They have united the two parts in one volume, and brought out the book in an elegant fashion. “Little Women” is, in its new form, as superb a holiday book for children as can be found in the issues of the season. It is a small quarto, beautifully bound and illustrated. Miss Alcott herself graces the frontispiece, her face beaming with kindness and good will, while an expression of deep thought lights up her features as if she were far away in some fancy flight in the land of dreams. The book is full of pictures of the very best kind. As for the immortal story, there is no need of saying a word in its favor, for we never yet heard of a child who had read it, who did not think it was the brightest and best story book that ever was written. Older readers will agree with them in coming under the spell, and appreciating more than they can do, the healthful atmosphere, charming naturalness, and ennobling influence that make the book a blessing as well as a source of entertainment to the little world whose amusement was its inspiration. Those who have books to choose for children will find nothing more desirable than this superb edition of “Little Women.”

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St. Nicholas 8.3 (January 1881): 254.

We are sure all our young readers will be glad to hear that Messrs. Roberts Brothers have just issued a new holiday edition of “Little Women.” The book is beautifully bound and printed, and contains more than two hundred excellent illustrations.

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I have been meaning to write you for a long time, to say how much I have always enjoyed you . . . Though I am nineteen years old, still I don’t feel a bit “grown-up,” and love the stories as much as ever. I wish Miss Alcott would write another story. I like hers so much. All her characters are so natural. A favorite amusement of mine is looking for people from the “book world” when I am out, and often I meet Jo, Laurie, and Amy from “Little Women” (one of the loveliest books in the world), and Rose, Mac, and Uncle Alec from “Eight Cousins.”

I want to tell you about our club; perhaps some other little girls would like to have one like it. We got the idea from Miss Alcott’s “Little Women.” Each member contributes so much a month to buy necessaries. Our meetings are weekly, and we write a paper to read at them. We do not have time to compose our stories, so we copy a great many of them from *St. Nicholas*.

Excerpt from “Successful Authors.” ([1887?]). Clippings File.

Miss Louisa M. Alcott is probably the only other writer in recognized literature [besides Harriet Beecher Stowe and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps] whose books have had a sale that may be called phenomenal. Her “Little Women” has reached this rank. It entered into the popular heart, and found permanent lodgment there. Miss Alcott must have received much money from her first successful book, and the popularity that has followed it is probably more steady than that of Miss Phelps. She writes in a minor key as compared with Mrs. Stowe, and is much less ambitious in her choice of themes than is Miss Phelps, but she has an audience that surely follows her, and her books hold their favor with the public without abatement.


I liked “Little Lord Fauntleroy” very much, and my sister Marian had a good cry when we heard that Miss Alcott was dead. I was awful sorry, because I think her books are just splendid; but I didn’t cry.

... We live in the suburbs of Memphis and we each have a pony. Mine is named Hero, Marian’s is Vivian, and Ellen’s (she is my little sister only three years old, but she can ride) is named “Brownie.” She thinks the Brownies in *St. Nicholas* are the “nicest ’ittle boys.” Marian and I call her pony “Ellen’s Tree,” the name “Jo” gave to the tree-limb, in “Little Women.”

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices


*Littel’s Living Age* 99.1278 (28 November 1868): 513.


The Literary World 4.8 (1 January 1874): 126.
The Academy 6.n.s.136 (12 December 1874): 630.
The Bookseller no. 215 (6 October 1875): 866.
The Independent 32.1670 (2 December 1880): 11:3.
Appletons’ Journal 10.56 (February 1881): 192.
The Critic and Good Literature n.s. 1.2 (12 January 1884): 22.
[Gilder, Jeannette L.]. The Critic n.s. 27.789 (3 April 1897): 236.
AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL (1870)
Miss Alcott’s “An Old-Fashioned Girl” will not disappoint the admirers of “Little Women,” all the quaintness of style and the hearty and natural freshness which makes that work a favorite being kept up in the new book with remarkable power. She takes occasion in the course of the story to apologize far [for] language used by her heroine, saying:

I deeply regret being obliged to shock the eyes and ears of such of my readers as have a prejudice in favor of pure English, by expressions like the above; but, having rashly undertaken to write a little story about Young America, for Young America, I feel bound to depict my honored patrons as faithfully as my limited powers permit; . . . [Remainder of sentence omitted.]

Miss Alcott’s Old-Fashioned Girl is promised on the first of April. It is a full-grown novel that has grown, however, from a seed dropped in Merry’s Museum. It will make a volume as large as “Hospital Sketches.” Miss Alcott is a writer of rare power. Let her beware of the American author’s greatest danger, writing too much.

Miss M. Louisa Alcott sails today for Europe, accompanied by her sister and a friend. Roberts Brothers gracefully and significantly record the date of her departure by the publication “An Old-fashioned Girl:’[”'] for fifteen thousand copies of which advance orders have been received. It will be the fervent hope of multitudes whom she has delighted and instructed, that Miss Alcott may be as successful in regaining the health and strength she seeks, as she has been in sending purest pleasure and genial counsel into households almost numberless all over the land. Her “Little Women” won her popularity in the homes of the people, as much by the manifestation of a noble womanly character, as by...
her skill as a writer; she has, if the phrases are pardonable, a genius for naturalness, and a gift for photographing young life that must have remembered experiences, accurate observation and loving sympathy for their inspiration.

Not wanting the qualities of an artist, in invention of incident, conduct of dialogue, descriptions of scenery, and whatever else goes to the endowment upon all her readers is mainly gained by her thorough genuineness and steady adherence to the real – without being sentimentally “goody” on the one hand or sensational false on the other. Honesty is in her seriousness, and equal honesty in her humor and wit; and hence her books, in their very healthfulness, have a peculiar and special fascination. There is no risk in predicting that “An Old Fashioned Girl” will follow quickly the footsteps of “Little Women,” wherever the latter have gone to prepare a way and a welcome for the like of themselves. Meanwhile, the reading of it will add to the general desire that its writer may soon be home again, to resume the pen she has been compelled to lay aside for a season.


Messrs. Roberts Brothers publish to-day, as Miss Alcott departs for Europe, her new story, “An Old-Fashioned Girl,” for which the prestige of “Little Women” has already secured an immense sale. Miss Alcott is likely to have as many readers as Mrs. Stowe in her palmiest days if she continues to write as sympathetically and naturally as in her later works.


It will be fully as popular as “Little Women,” for it is fully as good as that irresistible story. Its author will not be here to see how well it is received, for she sails today, in company with her artist-sister, on her voyage to the Old World. We trust that another year will bring her back to us, renewed in health and spirits, and ready to write another of her charming stories.


The tinge of satire which Miss Alcott throws into the title of her new novel, is really harmless and becoming; and no “girl of the period” need hesitate to read it, for fear of being too much snubbed and put down. The type of character here admirably portrayed, is both ancient and modern, while the incidents and touches of description and dramatic action are the very mirror of the present time. It is a
story of Eastern Massachusetts – nay, of Boston and its environs – and, like all Miss Alcott's stories, is easily to be recognized in persons and place. This fidelity to fact and circumstance has proved to be a great charm, since she has learned to select artistically from the every-day details of New England life; and there is no doubt that this new book is as good as "Little Women," though hastily written, and pieced out in making like a child's frock let down to a young lady's ankles. This is exactly what has happened, – for the little story in Merry's Museum, begun to please children, has grown in the last winter to an idyllic novel, suited to more mature readers of both sexes. Probably it will be most fascinating, however, to girls in their teens, who have been such enthusiastic admirers of "Little Women," and have given it a public far more numerous than the earlier works of Miss Alcott have had.

Freshness, cheerful vivacity, genuine humor and pathos, and a style excellently suited to her readers, are the obvious traits of Miss Alcott's genius. Besides these she has an eye of keen observation and a memory stored with the varied experiences of a life which has no parallel on earth – that of a young woman in New England who shares the fortunes of the people, while she has access also to the culture and opportunities of wealth. Other countries, and other regions of our own land have their own advantages; but that peculiar training of the intellect and the heart which New England girls in the middle rank of society receive is to be found nowhere else, and is fast making its mark on literature and art, as well as on our national development. Its manifestations are numberless, but none of them are worthier of hearty reception, or more sure to give satisfaction than the writings of Louisa Alcott.

Miss Louisa M. Alcott sailed for Europe on Saturday in search of health and recreation. Almost simultaneously with her departure, her last book "An Old Fashioned Girl" is published, in first edition of fifteen thousand copies, and even this large quantity bids fair to be soon exhausted. Miss Alcott has struck a vein in literature, which promises a large yield, and where there are so many failures, we are very glad to chronicle one success. Her books are simple, straightforward, natural stories, which her own sex find especially delightful and as studies of character, are interesting to all readers. Moreover there is an under-current of moral purpose in her stories, which unusually enough does not render them tedious to triflers, while it satisfies the conscientious as to their purity of tone. The talent, which Miss Alcott has developed in this line of writing within a year or two has already brought her profit and fame. We trust she will presently return invigorated in health and spirits. The world has been too long without such books as she writes.

**Worcester Evening Gazette 27.79 (4 April 1870): [2]:1.**

**The Daily American [Lawrence, Mass.] 10.80 (5 April 1870): [3]:3.**

*An Old Fashioned Girl* is the hearty title of Miss Louise Alcott's latest volume, issued this week by those discriminating
publishers, Roberts Brothers, Boston; like her “Little Women,” whose popularity has already swelled the total of sales to 45,000 copies, this story while written for the young people, has a charm and interest for all ages. Miss Alcott is one of the freshest, most sparkling and attractive story tellers of the day, and there is an honest sensibleness about this volume, which cannot fail to make it as popular as its predecessors; every one of her characters have real life, and “Polly,” the old fashioned girl, who will not consent to have her homely country name changed by her fashionable city cousin, is a downright, pure hearted, kind, lady-like, lovable girl, not presented as a perfect model, but as a decided improvement upon the “girl of the period,” – and her habits and ideas are contrasted with those of a fashionably educated young lady of the city. There is no effort at “moralizing,” but every page is bright with sound principle and good example, and none of the young people, but will be happier and better from its perusal, and we believe Polly, with her winsome ways, Tom, the jolly hearted, boyish boy, Fanny, Will and Maud, are to become as widely popular as Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy. “An Old Fashioned Girl,” is issued uniform with “Little Women,” and “Hospital Sketches,” one volume, illustrated, and is one of the best and brightest books of the season.


The “Old-fashioned Girl” is doubtless an attractive personage and an own cousin to the “Little Women” mentioned in the following note sent from Chicago to Miss Alcott:

Dear Jo, or Miss Alcott, –

We have all been reading “Little Women” and we liked it so much I could not help wanting to write to you. We think you are perfectly splendid; I like you better every time I read it. We were all so disappointed about your not marrying Laurie; I cried over that part, – I could not help it. We all liked Laurie ever so much, and almost killed ourselves laughing over the funny things you and he said. We are six sisters and two brothers; and there are so many things in “Little Women” that seemed so natural, especially selling the rags.

Eddie is the oldest; then there is Annie (our Meg), then Nelly (that’s me), May and Milly (our Beths), Rosie, Rollie, and dear little Carrie (the baby). Eddie goes away to school, and when he comes home for the holidays we have lots of fun, playing cricket, croquet, base ball, and everything. If you ever want to play any of those games, just come to our house, and you will find plenty of children to play with you.

Mamma said that your father was in the Unitarian Church, the other Sunday. The church is just across the road, from us, and I do wish he had come to see us and tell us all about you. Perhaps your father remembers a large house, just north east of the church, – that is where we live.

If you ever come to Chicago, I do wish you would come and see us, – we would like it so much.

I have named my doll after you, and I hope she will try and deserve it.
I do wish you would send me a picture of you. I hope your health is better, and you are having a nice time.

If you write to me, please direct Chicago, Ill. All the children send their love.

With ever so much love from your affectionate friend

Nelly.

**The Independent** 22.1114 (7 April 1870): 8:4.

Miss Alcott’s *Old Fashioned Girl* (Roberts Brothers) is a charming little book, brimful of the good qualities of intellect and heart which made “Little Women” so successful. We do not say that the *Old Fashioned Girl* is quite equal in force and freshness to “Little Women”; but we do say that the difference is not great – certainly not great enough to allow even the most invidious critic to speak of the later work as a falling off. *The Old Fashioned Girl* carries with it a teaching specially needed at the present day, and we are glad to know that it is even already a decided and a great success.

**The Christian Register** 49.15 (9 April 1870): 4:1.

A great charm of Miss Alcott’s books is that they are so thoroughly true to home life, – that she does not transport her characters into scenes with which she has had no personal acquaintance. With a sufficiently strong imagination to create characters, to frame incidents, and to portray scenes which may have had no actual counterpart, she is true to real life and character, and one feels as he reads her volumes that the author is writing from her own experience. The truthfulness to child nature in its manifold developments gave to her “Little Women” its great and deserved success, and will give to her new venture as wide a popularity. The plot is as simple and natural, the characters are drawn with as marked fidelity, and the contrast between the sturdy good sense of Polly and of the frivolity with which she came in contact in her city life is as happily not inferior to the best parts of her earlier work. A more thoroughly healthy story has not been written for a long time; and we doubt whether even Miss Alcott will do anything better.

**Hartford Daily Courant** 34.86 (9 April 1870): 2:3.

*The Old Fashioned Girl* needs less notice than any book of the season, for it has already gone on a forty-winged edition all over the country. The author of “Little Women” needs no introduction. That was a work of genius, a sort of inspiration of originality. By many we do not doubt that the “Old Fashioned Girl” will be thought its superior, as describing people more ordinarily met with. To us there is the difference between the two that there is between genius and talent. This is a capital book, excellent in its lessons, filled with characters perfectly drawn and outlined, for whom we do not care a button. But when we have said all, we conclude that it is a first rate book for children, bright, natural; and just the sort they love to read and ought to read.
No one can read this story without wishing we had more old-fashioned girls. Miss Alcott tells a story well. Her characters are well drawn. Each has its own destined individuality, and they are so much like some persons we have seen, that we forget that we are reading a story and not a sketch from real life. The old-fashioned girl is in one sense a child of nature, though education and training has well done its part in the formation of her character. Naturally possessed of warm and generous impulses, living in a country home under the guidance and training of a judicious mother, her character is developed naturally rather than cramped, stunted or forced into an unnatural growth by education. When first introduced to us her principles are sufficiently matured to lead her to despise show and affectation and be herself. The fashionable society into which she was brought, therefore called her old-fashioned, and she could but feel the slights and disparaging criticisms to which she was exposed on that account. Yet she had strength of character sufficient to resist the temptations of fashionable folly, to dare to be singular when to be right involved singularity. The author does not make her a perfect character. Such do not grow in this world. There is enough of girlish weakness displayed at times to show that she is one of us, and to heighten our respect for her conquering principles and virtues. The other characters in the story are drawn with equal truthfulness. It is a book that will not only interest, but benefit the reader. We might criticise the use of slang words and phrases, but the author claims that without these she should not have been true to life in describing fast Young America. But she in some instances puts these phrases into the mouths of those who should have been better taught. But if these are faults they are only spots on sun.

The fashionable follies and exaggerations of the day certainly do not go “unwhipped of justice.” They are frowned on by the seriously-minded; scarified by the satirical; ridiculed by the good-natured; and preached against by preachers and teachers. Miss Alcott contributes her portion of opposition and remonstrance, in a very pleasant and social way, by presenting us with the picture of the fashionable and the unfashionable feminine, at an early period of their existence. The contrast is not only all in favor of Polly, the old-fashioned girl, but she actually exerts more or less missionary influence in the circles in which she is placed, and turns the hearts of others from the path of vanity. She is such a breezy, healthy, sunny-tempered sprite, that when she enters a drawing-room she brings with her an unaccustomed oxygen, and revives even the pale-faced, prematurely old young ladies about her. The fact is that Polly – Miss Alcott was absolutely uncompromising when she decided on that name – is an uncommonly good little girl, with very good sense, very bright and hopeful spirits and a background of fresh health, which quite prepare her for the sturdy fight with the world it is her lot to make. We are sure she will have many admiring friends among those who have made the acquaintance
of the other little women to whom the
author has already introduced them. Her
cheerful philosophy and courage will fur-
nish a text from which many young girls
may preach their own sermons in private;
her domestic virtues and prompt helpfulness
will set before them an example well
worthy of imitation, and the magnetic at-
traction she exercises over nearly all who
are brought within its sphere will sug-
gest to some, at least, the thought of how
short a distance fine clothes go in winning
hearts for the wearer. An air of romance
is thrown over the story from the begin-
ning, as in the children who appear before
us the prospective lovers may be at once
detected. Polly and Tom are of course the
most prominent figures, and are painted
with so strong a local coloring, that we
feel at once that only in Boston air could
they have been born, bred and thriven to
maturity. Their counterparts may be met
every day upon the Common, or step-
ing from the cars which bring their fresh
young faces from the towns around the
metropolis.

Miss Alcott touches lightly but pleas-
antly upon several reformatory topics, and
always with a moderation and practical
wisdom that command respect. She is do-
ing a good work among the impressible
young hearts around her, and wins their
attention only to teach them sound and
healthful truths.

The Advance 3.137
(14 April 1870): 6:2.

Miss Alcott's previous works had prepared
us to expect in her latest book something
piquant, sensible, absorbing, wholesome—
and we have not been disappointed. Over-
looking some minor faults of execution
and detail, the plan of the present story is
excellent, its tone thoroughly natural, its
lesson healthful and not to be misunder-
stood. It is a genial yet powerful protest
against the vapidity, the idleness, the small
malice and the real wickedness that blast
the lives and distort the characters of so
many girls and women in fashionable so-
ciety, and make us long for a return to
something of the simplicity, the modesty,
the frugality and the neighborly goodness
of the old times.

Polly Milton is the heroine and the
“old-fashioned girl” of the story. She is
reared in comfortable poverty in a Mas-
achusetts country town, trained by a sen-
sible New England mother, and, in addi-
tion, has a fund of native good sense which
rarely, but sometimes, fails her. The art of
the story consists in sending Polly as a vis-
itor into stylish Boston society, and there
setting off her sweet womanliness and un-
spoiled grace against the false refinement,
the selfishness and the emptiness of the
rich and fashionable circle in which she
temporarily moves, and with which she is
heartily disgusted. Polly next appears as a
maiden resident of Boston, and a member
of the noble “fraternity” of women who
help themselves without making a great
noise about it. While, by teaching music,
she earns the means to keep a younger
brother at college, she finds time and heart
to help and cheer everybody about her
in a very possible, but very uncommon,
manner. Notwithstanding her self-reliant
and self-helpful ways, the old-fashioned
girl does not aspire to the platform nor
pine for the ballot, but remembers that
wife-hood and mother-hood are after all
the sphere of woman’s greatest influence,
independence and happiness. She accord-
ingly falls in love in a charmingly ridicu-
los manner with a harum-scarum fellow
totally unlike herself, and passes out of the
reader’s straining sight, in the closing chap-
ter, as plain Mrs. Tom Shaw.
There is nothing sensational in the narrative – nothing stilted nor over-done. We rejoice to say there is not a single violent death in the plot – the nearest approach to tragedy being the financial failure of Mr. Shaw, who takes the reverse bravely, and the bruising of Tom, who nearly breaks his neck by falling from a rather anachronistic velocipede. The various characters are sustained admirably, act like real, live boys and girls, and maintain a striking personality throughout. “An Old-Fashioned Girl” ought to be read by just two classes of persons – those who are enamored of so-called fashionable life, and those who are not. The former will see themselves in a very clear mirror, and learn something from this truthful reflection of their silly lives – the latter will see what they have escaped and bless their stars that they are “old fashioned.”

We regret to see so excellent a book marred by a few unnecessary imperfections. For instance, the author makes Grandma Shaw use the Frenchified expression, blasé, in speaking of certain worn-out fashionable misses. It is wholly out of keeping with the old-fashioned simplicity of taste and language which on every other occasion marks this excellent character. Again, in no less than half a-dozen instances the writer herself, (not her characters) uses laid for lay, or vice-versa. These errors of grammar, at least, should be corrected before a second edition is issued – and we hope fifty editions may be speedily called for.

Zion’s Herald 47.15
(14 April 1870): 173:2.

E., K. Boston Daily Evening Transcript
43.12,275 (16 April 1870): Sup. [1]:3.

A short story, begun in “Merry’s Museum,” and which told a little country girl’s adventures during a three months’ visit to the city, was, at the request of many readers, continued and brought to a happy ending in a book form. The author’s preface states that, in order to do this, since the first part of the story pictured the “Girls of the Period” of 1869, she was obliged to look into the future to see “the vision of the world, and the ages yet to be.” She also explained, for the benefit of those of her readers who have not been able to reconcile the dates in “Little Women,” that she trusts to the lively fancies of her young readers, which “will supply all deficiencies, and overlook all discrepancies.” She is able to grant the modest prayer of the lovelorn swain who, years ago, prayed the gods to

“Annihilate but time and space,
And make two lovers happy.”

The book shows that it has been hastily written, and bears marks of carelessness as to the minor morals of English and French grammar, but is none the less fresh and wholesome for all that. It is as breezy and natural, and full of honest boy-and-girl life as “Little Women.” It deals, to be sure, less

The Old-fashioned Girl, by Louisa Alcott (Roberts Bros.), will go of itself. She got started in her “Little Women.” She won’t stop yet. This is a lively story of a good, common-sense girl, who didn’t dare, and yet got the man she loved, as most common-sense girls do. It is a very enjoyable story.
with the life of one family, and its joys and
sorrows, hopes and fears; but it gives us
a glimpse of the boy and girl of today in
school and society.

The pictures of school-girls in the year
of our Lord 1869 are, according to our
own experience, overdrawn; but we have
been told that the author put into the
mouths of Trix and her friends only what
she had seen and known. There are “Old-
Fashioned Girls” still in the world, and let
us be thankful for it, and especially that we
meet them once in a while. There are many
of them in the world, some of them even in
Boston. And there are the grown-up girls,
too, such as Polly’s old friend helped her
to find, “a little sisterhood of busy, happy,
independent girls, who each had a pur-
pose to execute, a talent to develop, an
ambition to achieve, and brought to the
work patience and perseverance, hope and
courage.” They are not a dim vision of six
years hence, but a reality, and a blessed
one.

The charm of the book does not lie in
its plot, for it has none; nor in its philos-
ophy or its searching, for the mainsprings
of motives and the hidden side of human
nature. It is full of busy, happy, active life.
Polly plays the part of sunbeam-in-chief,
as a girl like her always does, advising
and comforting her friends, helping them
out of scrapes and into love. For “lover-
ing” has its share of the book to the de-
light of forlorn little women who have not
yet ceased bemoaning the hard headedness
of the writer, who would not let Laurie
marry Joe, in spite of all demonstrations
by older friends of the unfitness of such a
thing.

There is nothing unreal in the book.
The talks between the girls are photo-
graphic in their truthfulness, and Maud’s
quickness and sharpness are just as life-
like. Maud is of the opinion of another
little friend of ours aged five, who says, “I
have heard people say ‘Little pitchers have
great ears,’ and whenever I hear anybody
say anything I stick out both of my ears as
far as I can.”

Miss Alcott is, it seems, interested in
solving a problem which has always puzz-
led us, namely: What becomes of people
who have neither a wood-fire nor a grand-
mother? The old lady is the most carefully-
drawn character in the book, and her
old-time stories are evidently founded on
facts.

The book will be a favorite, we think,
with girls who are old-fashioned enough
to believe that

“What is true and just and honest,
What is lovely, what is pure,
All of praise that hath admonished,
All of virtue, shall endure;”

and that these fashions will never grow
old.

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A brave, intelligent girl – “no be-god non-
sense, you know” – old fashioned only in
that like our mothers, she knew she had
duties to fulfill in this world, did fulfill
them, while at the same [time] her heart
was as tender and true as ever yielded to
an honorable man’s assault. The story has
interest enough to carry the reader along to
the close, while the woman’s rights motif
that informs it is by no means so pro-
nounced as to dominate the harmony of
its composition. We certainly like this “old
fashioned girl,” and wish there were many
such hereabouts.
Miss Alcott’s new story deserves quite as great a success as her famous “Little Women,” and we dare say will secure it. She has written, we suppose, chiefly for the young, but she has produced a book which child and parent alike ought to read, for it is neither above the comprehension of the one nor below the taste of the other. Her boys and girls are so fresh, hearty, and natural, the incidents of her story are so true to life, and the tone is so thoroughly healthy, that a chapter of the “Old-Fashioned Girl” wakes up the unnatural better life within us almost as effectually as an hour spent in the company of good, honest, sprightly children. “The Old-Fashioned Girl,” Polly Milton, is a delightful creature who has been taught to respect her elders, to be modest, simple, and obedient, to do all she can for the happiness of other people, to dress sensibly according to her means, to abjure flirting, to hate deception, to love her own family, and to make puddings. But we hasten to add that she is not a bit of a prig, and would make a miserable figure in a Sunday-School Library of goody books. She is a visitor, through the first half of the volume, at the house of a fashionable family in Boston, where the young people have all the modern small vices that befit their years; where brother and sister quarrel, girls are coquettes and fine ladies before they are old enough to leave the nursery, and envy, jealousy, meanness, slander, lies, and extravagance are as prevalent in the school-room as in the most favored circles of our best society. In the course of the six or seven years occupied in the progress of the story, Polly succeeds with the aid of an opportune bankruptcy in reforming this unhappy family. Meanwhile the young paragon has become a music-teacher and (we say it with bated breath) a member of a circle of intellectual young women of rather Bohemian proclivities, and has suffered a good deal on account of a certain young man, besides making another young man suffer on her account. However, all comes right at last, and the story closes with marriages enough for a regular novel.

The principal charm of the book is in the lively dialogue. Miss Alcott is not especially successful in reproducing the conversation of young gentlemen from college, though the talk of the young ladies and the boys and girls is as natural as life. We feel disposed to find fault with a few of the incidents, – with the proper and prudent Polly, for example, lolling back in a balcony seat at the theater, while her admirer, Mr. Sydney, leans over her shoulder from the seat behind and fans her. Maybe good young ladies of twenty behave that way in Boston, but we have our doubts about it. We have much more serious fault to find with Miss Alcott’s grammar. Trifling violations of the rules of Murray we can bear, for they only make the dialogue more natural; but phrases such as “Each pays what they can,” are too much for critical endurance.

Of Miss Alcott’s *Old-Fashioned Girl*, (with which Roberts Brothers have
befittingly supplemented “Hospital Sketches” and “Little Women,” by the same author,) we confidently relied on a bright little reader to give us a discriminating opinion. It came in the words – “I have read it through twice; it is all real interesting; but it hasn’t the nice little touches of “Little Women.”[“] We are hardly willing to accept this judgment as conclusive of the merit of the book, but it shows that it is not a counterpart of anything the author has lately written – and this indicates her versatility and resources. A more mature reader will probably find excellences in it that did not strike him in “Little Women” or “Hospital Sketches,” for it is suitable for all ages and will find appreciation in all conditions of life. We quite adopt the criticism of a contemporary who says it is an honest, hearty story, showing the absurdity and unhappiness of the children whom fashion robs of their childhood, and painting an entirely charming picture of a merry, healthy, kind, little old-fashioned girl, who did a world of good without knowing it, and who made sunshine wherever she was. Miss Alcott’s style is easy, animated and agreeable; her characters have real life, and Polly, Fanny, Tom, Will and Maud will become like actual living friends to thousands of readers, as Meg, Joe, Beth and Amy have already become. There is no preaching in this bright story; no professional moralizing; but every good thing is taught in it nevertheless; every page shows the exceeding beauty of noble principle, and of tender love, of patience, sweetness and confidence, of useful work, and of happy homes. Every word that is said of woman’s work and woman’s independence is admirable, and the description of the young girl-artists in their studio is one of the many very good things in the book.

The Liberal Christian

We have already given our readers a taste of the quality of Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s “Old-Fashioned Girl,” (Boston: Roberts, Brothers), and we wish we could give all of them such an idea of its interest and attractiveness as would send them straight to buy and read it. The author says “The [“]Old-Fashioned Girl” is not intended as a perfect model, but as a possible improvement upon the “Girl of the Period,” who seems sorrowfully ignorant or ashamed of the good old fashions which made woman truly beautiful and honored, and through her, render home what it should be – a happy place, where parents and children, brothers and sisters, learn to love and know and help one another.” Everybody who reads the book will agree that the heroine is a most lovable creature, and will wish that she could be seen everywhere in real life.

The same qualities appear in this work which delighted everybody when they read “Little Women,” and we think this book will be quite as popular as that. Both of them ought to be in all the Sunday school libraries in the land. We have a fraternal interest in all the good work that is done in this country, and we have been glad to see Miss Alcott win such an audience for the pleasant and helpful teaching embodied in her stories. She is a hardworking writer, and is very likely to go on to still higher and better achievements. She needs the ripening influence of leisure, of study, travel and experience, and this we trust she will have in her visit to Europe. While we have been waiting to read the book through, before writing this notice,
it has already sold up to ever-so-many thousands.

There are some errors in this copy which ought to be marked by the proof-reader for future editions.


Polly Milton, carefully trained under the elevating influence of a refined New England home, goes to visit her city friends, and carries the charm of a country life into the artificial and conventional atmosphere which surrounds her. From simple force of character, and the power of a pure life, she gains, by slow degrees, a healthful influence over and a loving appreciation from every member of the family.

“An Old-Fashioned Girl” is the title of the volume which gives her experience in a succession of pictures sketched with a vigorous hand, full of brilliant coloring, and portraying everyday life with a freshness and charm that finds its way to the hearts of all readers. How true to life is the description of Polly’s arrival, where she discusses the fashions with Fanny, and impressed with the elegance of city fashions in contrast with the simplicity of her own wardrobe, naively says: “Don’t you ever forget to lift your sash, and fix those puffy things when you sit down?” How full of genuine enjoyment is the scene where Polly breaks away from the conventionality that hems her in, and finds rare fun in coasting on the common with the children she meets, and afterwards with Tom and his famous Mazeppa. The chapter where the children peep into Polly’s trunk, read her journal, and look at her caricatures, is admirably done; the gossiping world developed in the chapter called Needles and Tongues is human nature itself; and the peaceful refuge of Grandma’s room serves as a neutral background for bringing out the lights and shades of the prominent figures in the successive paintings.

We lose our interest partially after the family have grown up, made love, and taken part in the stern realities of life. We can not be entirely reconciled to a story which has already culminated in 1875, although we may easily imagine that six years hence history will still repeat its joys and sorrows.

Miss Alcott’s power does not lie in the skill of her plot, or in the unraveling of complicated mysteries, but in her charmingly fresh and graphic pictures of common life. She paints these with a reality to which every one’s experience bears witness. Her boys and girls are “just like folks,” as the children say; we think some of them must be drawn from her own life, for they have the strength which only comes from actual experience. Her creations take hold of the imagination, develop the heart, and entrance the fancy of old and young.

What more grateful tribute can be paid to her, than the success which has crowned her labors! With what artistic joy, with what loving interest, must she look upon the twenty thousand “Old Fashioned Girls,” knocking at every door; entering happy homes as welcome guests all over the land; comforting lonely hearts; preaching acceptable sermons on the power of a pure life; arousing a desire to make others happy by the silent teaching of example; and inculcating a pure morality by the force of inborn strength of character.

Gladly we welcome the Old-Fashioned Girl to heart and home; joyfully we herald her progress over the land; hopefully we
look forward to the time when our young people following her example will also be old-fashioned in purity of heart and simplicity of life, thus brightening like a sunbeam the atmosphere around them.

Punchinello 1.5 (30 April 1870): 78.

The author of “Little Women” seeks, and not without success, to draw from her “Old-Fashioned Girl” a contrast and a moral. She presents to our view two young ladies of opposite “styles.” One is fresh and rural: the other isn’t. The difference between country and city bringing-up is the point aimed at; and the difference is about as great as that between the warbling of woodside birds and the jingle of one of Offenbach’s tunes on a corner barrel-organ. The book is neatly set forth, with illustrations by Messrs. Roberts, Brothers, of Boston.


The “little men and women” who last year made the delightful acquaintance of Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, will hail with joy the advent of the Old Fashioned Girl whom Miss Alcott graciously introduces to them. A charming companion we have found her; although hardly to the same degree as were her little friends of a year ago. Over the first seven chapters we clapped our hands, and declared it every bit as good as “Little Women,” but the remainder scarcely sustained our verdict. The inequality, if it exists otherwhere than in our fancy, may be naturally enough accounted for. The first chapters were written leisurely, as they were published in the monthly numbers of “Merry’s Museum.” The rest of the book, beginning with the eighth chapter, owes its existence to certain “beseeching little letters” that clamored for a sequel in a manner which made refusal impossible. Hence with a hiatus of six years in the author’s imagination and one in her actual work, the rest of the story has been written, hurriedly, under the burden of ill-health, and in the midst of preparations for a journey to Europe. It would have been strange if, under these circumstances, the grace, naturalness and finish of the earlier chapters had been carried to the end.

But we make this distinction not in disparagement of the work as a whole, but to point out the part of it we find most admirable where all is good. “Polly” is a charming creature, “old-fashioned” only in the good old fashions of modesty, good sense, courage and kindness of heart, which we hope will not only be revived again and again, like other old fashions, but enjoy a perpetual renewal. Tom is the most natural of boys, not at all as if he came out of a book, but as if, Topsy-like, he “just growed.” Of course he has a rough-and-tumble time of it – genuine boys usually do – but like all that kind of boys he comes squarely up on his feet at last. Maud and Fanny make as equally good figures as “girls of the period,” and have the merit of improving upon acquaintance.

The charm of the story is largely in its graphic descriptions, in the author’s faculty of striking into a picture whatever she touches. She understands the power of novel and dramatic “situations,” and uses it to the best advantage. The book might be illustrated on almost every page and each
have its peculiar individuality and spirit. For instance, the coasting scene of Polly and Tom, the dressing of Tom’s wound, Polly’s anger at the reading of her journal, the reconciliation in the closet, the scene in the grandmother’s room; or, later, Polly and Will, the box at the opera, the scene in the studio, Mr. Shaw and his children in the study, and so on ad infinitum.

We could wish that Young America had been a little less rampant in the rhetoric of the story, notwithstanding the author’s apology on the ground that, “having rashly undertaken to write a story about young America for young America, she feels bound to depict her honored patrons as faithfully as her limited powers permit.” Our complaint is not entirely that she makes Young America talk slang, although it seems quite unnecessary that they should talk it any more in a book than outside of it; but when the author herself says that “Polly pranced into the room evidently spoiling for a dance,” Young America can hardly be held accountable.

But if not without its blemishes, the story of the “Old-Fashioned Girl” is very bright, racy and enjoyable, and all our little folks, as well as many older ones, will bless the author for this parting souvenir, while they pray her to bring back from foreign lands the stores of future delights.

The Galaxy 9.5 (May 1870): 710.

Miss Alcott continues to work out her rich and new vein of fiction. She has just given to the world, through the publishing house of Roberts Bros. of Boston, a story called “An Old-fashioned Girl.” In this book Miss Alcott ventures on the bold experiment of projecting her mind into the future, and carrying the fortunes of her heroine forward through six or seven years beyond the date of this present writing. It seems the first part of the book was written as a serial publication in 1869, and it gave evidence of its date; but there were so many demands urged for a sequel, “in beseeching little letters that made refusal impossible,” that Miss Alcott had to give in, and shingle out into the fog, to adopt the language of the Western joke—in other words, build her story out into the future. No reader, young or old, ought to blame the pertinacity on the one hand, or the compliance on the other, which has produced this pleasant volume. The “Old-fashioned Girl” is not, perhaps, quite equal in freshness and animation to “Little Women,” but she is a chip of the same block, and is sure to have a cordial welcome from the public.

The Bookseller no. 148 (2 May 1870): 410.

The author of “Little Women,” a series of stories already noticed in The Bookseller, has reason to be proud of her popularity. The first part of “An Old-Fashioned Girl” was written in 1869, whereupon there came to her the demand for a sequel, “in beseeching little letters that made refusal impossible,” and the result is the present volume, in which the heroine is “carried boldly forward some six or seven years into the future.” The story is amusing, and gives us clear glimpses in some circles of American society. Young American girls of twelve or fourteen, we find from this work, dress for, and receive presents from, young gentlemen of sixteen or eighteen, have their flirtations, and are subject to the jealousies of older people in England.
We are not surprised that Miss Alcott should have established herself as a favorite with a vast circle of readers, and that every book from her ready pen finds rapid sale, a sale reckoned by thousands of copies. She is one of the most eminently natural writers of the day. She does not set to herself a very high aim in the dominion of art: she never attempts high art at all. She does not paint holy families or madonnas, like Rafaelle; but, understanding and gauging correctly her own abilities, she addresses herself to the production of charming and homely interiors, like the Flemish painters. In this she shows rare wisdom. With her facility she might be tempted to take up some heroic or poetic subject, for which really she has not fitness, and thus neglect, or perhaps disdain, the lower walk of art, in which she works with a masterful hand. It would have been hard to persuade Miss Mitford that her fame would ultimately rest more on the sketches she threw off so hastily, and in such an effortless way, for mere pelf, than on all her ambitious dramas. Yet, so it is. We love her as the author of “Our Village,” while we forget the very names of her Rienzis and Julians.

Miss Alcott sustains the reputation her Little Women (of which there are two series) have made for her in the the [sic] Old-Fashioned Girl. It is a very successful picture of the advantages of the system of things which seems passing away, as contrasted with the modern style of bringing up and educating girls. We hope silly, fashionable mothers will be content to learn some wholesome lessons from it. There never was a writer who could render common chit-chat with the naturalness of Miss Alcott. To hear it read makes one’s head turn to see the girls who are exchanging opinions and sentiments and confidences. Polly lives and talks and cries, and is wise and foolish, just as the girls we know; indeed, we are certain we have met Polly over and again in our daily walks. And for boy-nature, Tom is just as true to life. He crosses our path twenty times a day, and we hear his bona fide talk continually; his roistering ways; his impertinencies; his goodheartedness. Yes, we know the boy thoroughly; we own the truth of Miss Alcott’s portraiture. There is nothing better in this volume than the sermon with a plum-pudding for a text. Indeed, we can commend the book as fresh, entertaining, racy, and altogether wholesome.
story, quite as fresh, unconventional, and true as “Little Women,” though it will hardly be as popular with the little folks. In fact, it is written for an older audience, and in a literary point of view belongs in a class by itself, being neither quite young enough for a children’s story, nor quite old enough for a novel. “Tom” and “Polly” are genuine additions to American literature. We doubt whether failing is quite such a means of grace ordinarily as it proved in the case of the Shaw family, and the Toms and Fan- nys of real life do not develop such sterling qualities in manhood and womanhood out of material so meagre in early youth. But there is no more romance than is needed to give zest to the story, and he must be a very “proper” person indeed who can not give Polly the most cordial congratula- tions on her marriage to her erratic but reclaimed lover. Is it any sign of a pop- ular uprising against the tyrannical reign of Mrs. Grundy that such a book as this is so popular? Or will the “girl of the pe- riod” read it only for the sake of a laugh at the old-fashioned girl, but with no thought of emulating her example or imitating her character?

The Atlantic Monthly
25.152 (June 1870): 752–53.

If we said that Miss Alcott, as a writer for young people just getting to be young ladies and gentlemen, deserved the great good luck that has attended her books, we should be using an unprofessional frankness and putting in print something we might be sorry for after the story of the “Old-fashioned Girl” had grown colder in our minds. And yet it is a pretty story, a very pretty story; and almost inexplicably pleasing, since it is made up of such plain material, and helped off with no sort of adventure or sensation. It is nothing, in fact, but the story of a little girl from the country, who comes to visit a gay city fam- ily, where there is a fashionable little lady of her own age, with a snubbed younger sister, a gruff, good-hearted, mischievous brother, – as well as a staid, sensible papa, a silly, sickly mamma, and an old-time grandmother. In this family Polly makes herself ever so lovely and useful, so that all adore her, though her clothes are not of the latest fashion, nor her ideas, nor her prin- ciples; and by and by, after six years, when she returns again to the city to give music- lessons and send her brother to college, Mr. Shaw fails, and the heartlessness of fashionable life, which his children had begun to suspect, is plain to them, and Tom’s modish fiancée jilts him, and Polly marries him, and Fanny Shaw gets the good and rich and elegant Sydney, who never cared for her money, and did not make love to her till she was poor. That is about all; and as none of these people or their doings are strange or remarkable, we rather wonder where the power of the story lies. There’s some humor in it, and as little pathos as possible, and a great deal of good sense, but also some poor writing, and some bad grammar. One enjoys the simple tone, the unsentimentalized facts of common expe- rience, and the truthfulness of many of the pictures of manners and persons. Besides, people always like to read of kindly self- sacrifice, and sweetness, and purity, and naturalness; and this is what Polly is, and what her character teaches in a friendly and unobtrusive way to everybody about her. The story thus mirrors the reader’s good-will in her well-doing, and that is perhaps what, more than any other thing, makes it so charming and comfortable; but if it is not, pleasing the little book remains nevertheless; and nobody can be the worse for it. Perhaps it is late to observe that the
scene of the story is in Boston; at least, the locality is euphuistically described as “the most conceited city in New England”; and we suppose Springfield will not dispute the distinction with us.

Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine 80.480 (June 1870): 576.

“What is there new and good among books?” asked a friend the other day. “Miss Alcott’s ‘Old-Fashioned Girl,’ ” was our unhesitating answer. It is really the book of the month, fresh and charming, though not entirely original, as “Polly” bears a family resemblance to the young heroines in “Little Women.” It is a book that everybody, young and old, will read, and everybody, fashionable or old-fashioned, be delighted with.

Hours at Home 11.2 (June 1870): 196.

There is such a janty [jaunty], off-hand, bewitching air about Miss Alcott’s last story of An Old-Fashioned Girl (Roberts Brothers), that somehow criticism seems to be an impertinence. All we can do, or at least want to do, is to say some pleasant word of recognition, and pass on. We wonder if the rising generation, and the risen too, know what a wholesome pill they are so eagerly devouring in the guise of a delightsome sugar-plum. For never was more sound principle, never more healthy sentiment nor timely doctrine and reproof presented in heartier, livelier, more “taking” style. If not a book for all time, it is precisely the book for a day, and that the one in which we live.

The Spectator (11 June 1870).

We are glad to see that Miss Alcott is becoming naturalized among us as a writer, and cannot help congratulating ourselves on having done something to bring about the result. The author of “Little Women” is so manifestly on the side of all that is “lovely, pure, and of good report” in the life of women, and writes with such genuine power and humour, and with such a tender charity and sympathy, that we hail her books with no common pleasure. An Old-Fashioned Girl is a protest from the other side of the Atlantic against the manners of the creature which we know on this by the name of “the Girl of the Period;” but the attack is delivered with delicacy as well as force.


Let whoever wishes to read a bright, spirited, wholesome story get the ‘Old-Fashioned Girl’ at once! It is not our fault if the male readers who follow our advice should close the book with a pang of regret that Polly, the heroine – Polly, the darling – is an entirely unattainable treasure. Neither will it be our fault if a standard is set up of a nice girl, – so high that most of the
young ladies of their acquaintance shall seem to fall short of it; for Polly is a heroine in a book, and perhaps, after all, they would not have recognized how very good and pleasant she was, unless Miss Alcott had been there to tell them and to open their eyes. ‘The Old-Fashioned Girl’ is an American story and there are little traits of life and manners which give a pleasant flavour of novelty to the tale; we have had several hearty laughs over the book, for it is full of fun. The picture of society amongst the young people in America is, we would hope, an exaggeration; and we heartily trust that the like fashions may never prevail in the school-rooms and nurseries of England; but if they should show themselves, we hope that some “old-fashioned girl” like Polly Milton will come and drive them away.


This is a charming little book. There is a freshness and a life about it, which are seldom met with in our publications for the young, and a truthfulness which renders it peculiarly attractive. No attempt is made to portray a hero, or a heroine, so painfully perfect that, instead of trying to imitate, the youthful reader is content to admire, at a distance. The interest of the story, too, is admirably sustained.

Every ‘young lady’ should ‘read, mark, learn and inwardly digest’ this story of ‘an old-fashioned girl.’ An old-fashioned girl! Why, is not every girl old-fashioned now-a-days? An old-fashioned girl is, indeed, simply a girl; and we do like a girl that is a girl. The world is full of ‘young ladies’ from six to eight and ten years of age; but as for girls – bless their beautiful souls! – they are ‘like angels’ visits, few and far between.’ As, in this age of wonderful progress, the electric spark bounds the broad Atlantic at a leap, so our beautiful babies pass, with the speed of lightning, the period of childhood. First a baby, and then a young lady or gentleman, and never a girl or boy. When a friend informed us, some time ago, that his wife had a daughter two weeks old, we instantly reminded him that our daughter had a school for ‘young ladies’; carefully avoiding the word girls as altogether too old-fashioned for ‘ears polite.’

‘An old-fashioned girl’; that is, according to our authoress, a real girl, is one who thinks more of principle than of parade, of benevolence than of bonnets, of reason than of ribbons. She cares for the inside, as well as the outside, of her head. She deems rather more highly of her mission in the world, than that it is her chief business merely to look pretty, dress fine, and fit herself out for fools and foplings to flirt with. She aims, in short, to cultivate and develop the godlike in her mind, no less than the doll-like in her person. She aims, in other words, at the high ideal of the Poet:

A perfect woman, nobly planned,  
To warm, to comfort, and command;  
And yet a spirit still, and bright  
With something of an angel light.


Of American writers of “juveniles,” as the publishers call them, the number has come to be immense. Almost every religious denomination has its thousands of Sunday schools, in each of which it is thought necessary that there should be a library, filled
with books, which may be good, but which must at all costs be denominational, and which, therefore, can be written by almost anybody. And it is an established belief among parents generally, sectarian and unsectarian, that, so long as a child does not read books that are “immoral,” he cannot read too much; and that a book’s being in every way foolish does not make it so harmful that the child needs to be protected against it. What, then, must be the character of the reading that is prepared for the world of youthful readers is easily seen. It is a fact that, within the last ten or fifteen years, one of the most successful of our writers for children has turned out, not three volumes, or four, or five, or ten, but no less than forty-six. And he has not only issued his six volumes of the “Boat Club Series” and six of the “Starry Flag Series,” and five or six each of half-a-dozen other sets of volumes, but he is the editor of a monthly magazine for boys and girls; and, moreover, he will, no doubt, be ready at Christmas to add four or five more volumes to those which he has already published. That there should be any nutriment in the daily and hourly skimmings of a mind that can consent to work in this manner is an impossibility, and it must be simply a misfortune to a child to be submitted to the influence of such a story teller and moralist. It is in his publishers and bankers’ books only that a justification can be found for his; it is out of reason that he should be successful otherwise than pecuniarily. Yet, except in the matter of fecundity, the author to whom we allude is a fair specimen of the common run of our writers for children, and his performances are on the ordinary level of “juveniles.” He sells more volumes than the others, but he does not sell different ones—the very great majority of such things being the work of writers at once incompetent and given to money-getting, or incompetent merely. Most such authors, it would almost seem, are persons who think incompetency to write for adults a sufficient reason why they should write for children; and they prey on the young, and preach to them, just as a certain sort of clerical gentleman, incapable of keeping together a congregation at home, goes out as a missionary to the illiterate heathen, and gets a living by “talking down” to people who do not understand him, to be sure, and do not get good from him, and who, for anything he cares, get from him good or get from him harm, but who like to listen to talk, and are willing to give him a living for talking. But there are missionaries, too, of another kind—men and women who put to shame most of us that stay at home; and so, it is needless to say, there are writers for children who command the admiring respect of the best writers for men, and of the best readers; but between them and the majority of writers for children the difference is infinite. Hans Andersen, for instance, there is nobody who patronizes; nor does any one, writer or reader, look down on the brothers Grimm, or the author of “Robinson Crusoe,” or Mr. Lewis Carroll’s narration of “Alice’s Adventures,” or the sketches made in fairyland by Mr. George Macdonald.

There is no country in the world, it is said, where children count for so much as in the United States, nor where so much is done for them; but, for some reason or other, we have not produced any thoroughly good writer for children. Possibly it may be true, as is charged against us by enemies, that it is only Young America that is born here, and that there are never any Americans who really are young. At all events, whether from want of an audience, or from whatever cause, it is easy to name all the American writers who at all skilfully address themselves to the childlike mind. Miss Louisa Alcott we take to be about as good as any, though one sort of the work that she does Mrs. Whitney perhaps does
better. The young lady who is all but mar-
riageable, but who has not yet quite fin-
ished her last year of boarding-school –
the New England young lady who has still
some months of school-life to finish, but
who begins to have opinions in regard to
the niceness of various young gentlemen;
who, though she may play croquet, has
“views of life;” who goes to the Thursday
afternoon concerts in Boston, and to the
Horticultural Hall lectures on Sundays;
who has a cultivated taste in music and
an eclectic turn in religions – this mingled
young girl and young lady, produced in the
vicinity of Boston and not elsewhere, Mrs.
Whitney draws with what seems to the un-
learned eye perfection. Miss Alcott draws
her too; but, on the whole, Miss Alcott’s
sympathies seem to be rather with earlier
stages of life than with this of which we
speak, and there is – at least to the adult
reader – something of a fresher sense of
boyhood and girlhood to be got from her
writing than from that of her cleverer con-
temporary. Miss Alcott, however, no more
than Mrs. Whitney, is free from an influ-
ence which it appears to be agreed shall be
called Bostonian, and which is, doubtless,
of disadvantage to any one who proposes
to make literature in which there shall be
at once matter to interest children and,
so to speak, the living figures of children
themselves. Self-consciousness in not the
worst sense of that term – a constant con-
sciousness of the goodness and beauty and
admirableness of one’s good and beauti-
ful and admirable acts and thoughts and
behavior – a sort of patronizing and Jack-
Horner-like practice of all excellent virtues
and graces – would seem to be extremely
common in that corner which knows it-
self to be the new and improved umbilicus
mundi.

Then, too, it may be said of this “Old-
Fashioned Girl” of Miss Alcott’s that it is
done from the outside, and that what is
depicted is only partly the thing that was
to be depicted, and is partly Miss Alcott’s
not perfectly intelligent and sympathetic
conception of it. It is not boys, we should
say, it must be women, who have acquain-
tance with any boy so persistently touzly-
headed as Miss Alcott’s “Tom,” and so
extravagantly fond of pockets full of pea-
nuts, and so sure to get into scrapes which
prove nothing at all against the sinner’s
moral character, but merely bear witness
to his superfluous animal spirits and energy.
And, doubtless, our author’s girls, also, are
to some extent artificial, and persons of
her drama rather than real persons – crea-
tures of her will rather than beings with
wills of their own. This is not always true,
for every reader must recognize in Miss Al-
cott’s stories many pictures that are strictly
photographic – that are, indeed, strictly
ture to nature. But, speaking generally, her
personages exist for their creator’s pur-
poses, not their own; they all are made that
they may point a moral. The hero must
preach a woman’s notion of manliness –
must be, violently, the nondescript known
to women as The Boy; the heroine must
be, out and out, the “old-fashioned girl” –
that is to say, she must be unsophisticated
to a degree which makes it too manifest
that she was created in a world very famil-
arily acquainted with sophistication; the
second heroine must be a “new-fashioned
girl” of the most decided and fashionable
type, and the doings and fortunes of these
personages must be such as to teach us the
value and beauty of simplicity and hon-
esty, and the folly and badness and hol-
lowness of pretension and display. Thus a
wide door is opened to unnaturalness; and
that a good deal of unnaturalness does not
come in, few readers would say.

But – to stick to the quotation – if Miss
Alcott’s personages do rather too much
and too regularly point a moral, they also
in their way do adorn a tale; and the
readers of her books are exceedingly few,
discriminating and undiscriminating, who
have not got from them pleasure. They are unfailingly good-hearted and kind-hearted; they have a great deal of fun in them, and a great deal of good sense; no one will learn from them to admire any moral qualities but those that are to be admired; they are, as stories, well enough constructed, and whether or not the author’s “call to preach” she does well to answer, and whether or not her art of portraiture is defective, it is certain that she assists the reader to reproduce his youth, and to sympathize with the young and innocent and happy. Those who demand of each worker in literature an artistic success will be of another opinion, but to have produced, whether artistically and legitimately or otherwise, the effect with which we have credited Miss Alcott, seems to us not a small service to have rendered. Perhaps we might say more than this, and credit our author with having written books well adapted to the wishes of her ostensible audience, and likewise to its needs. Certainly her stories have been read by an immense number of girls and boys. But girls and boys read anything and everything, and are easily pleased; and, on the whole, one would set down Miss Alcott as being of that class of writers for children who write not so much for children as about them, and would not predict for her the true success of writers of “juveniles,” as of other works – the pleasing of more generations than one.

Voltaire once said, “Would you be popular, startle your public – whether for good or evil, it matters not, but be startling at any price.” This maxim, so venal in principle, appears to be regarded by a considerable number of modern novelists as one of the most important rules of literary composition... It is now understood that a book which appeals to the imagination must be sensational or it cannot be successful as a pecuniary speculation. In opposition to this verdict, few writers of romance, either here or in England, have lately attempted to address the public in a style entirely free from the influence of passion. A novel refined in thought, pure in morals, and yet sufficiently tender and exciting to touch the heart and to captivate the fancy, is now so great a rarity that the critic is disposed to hail such a volume with expressions of enthusiastic esteem. Still, it must not be supposed that legitimate fiction has ceased to elicit the attention of authors, or has wholly failed to attract the patronage of the public. On the contrary, it would be easy to name some honorable exceptions to the present literary degeneracy, and among these exceptions, which, to a great extent, owe their creation to female talent, a position must be accorded to An Old-Fashioned Girl.

Miss Alcott cannot indeed claim an extraordinary share of original genius, or a more diversified experience of human nature than has fallen to the lot of other conspicuous writers of the day. But every unbiased judge must admit that the work we are now considering is distinguished for delicate and faithful portraiture, a simple, graceful and modest style, a sensible appreciation of womanly character, a proper regard for the wants of real society, and, above all, a decided acknowledgment of the superior claims of mental and moral worth. These qualities in a modern work of fiction are surely uncommon enough to warrant particular eulogy.

It is true that Miss Alcott has not entirely escaped the materialistic influences which permeate the atmosphere of modern society; but she appears to have breathed this fatal miasma in a moderate degree, and her book has thus escaped any positive detriment. In fact, from the praises here accorded to her performance, it will be seen that her faults lie rather in her failure to give a complete impersonation of female virtues and instincts than in any visible departure from the model approved by reason and experience. Miss Alcott writes like an honest and fearless woman, and the effort she has so lately made to inspire her fellow-women of America, especially the younger portion of them, with a loftier and a worthier ambition, deserves acknowledgment. Any author who is sufficiently wise and determined to oppose with judgment the errors and follies of his age, even when they are indirectly countenanced by those who arrogate to themselves the title of philosophers, is certainly deserving of generous congratulation; but when to this exhibition of wisdom and determination are added the amenities of a wholesome literary style, we may fairly presume to rank the fortunate writer among the philanthropists of his times.

Miss Alcott has the modesty to admit that she does not propose her *Old-Fashioned Girl* as a faultless type of womanhood; but it is doubtful if she could, under existing circumstances, have produced a more elevated exemplar. The womanhood of America, though characterized by certain traits that are highly attractive, cannot, in a general way, be said to merit the encomiums with which our national pride would urge us to honor it. There are some American women as noble, as refined, as sensible and as sympathetic as any in the world; but many, nay very many, of our daughters, our wives, and even our mothers, are still too frivolous in their mode of life, too material in their ambition, too selfish in their pursuits, to endure the scrutiny of an unprejudiced criticism.

The little book which has elicited these reflections has already demonstrated, by the popularity which it has acquired, that in the rising generation of American girls there are thousands who are able to perceive and to appreciate the value of a social existence which is not entirely sacrificed to the puerilities of fashionable caprice and to the treacherous demands of a selfish philosophy. Let us trust that the good seed which Miss Alcott’s book has sown, even if it be not the best which the hand of the social husbandman could have scattered, may fructify in youthful bosoms until it shall produce ample fruit; and may this harvest of more elevated thought and loftier morals form the substance of still higher and worthier efforts, until the work of regeneration has been happily accomplished.

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**Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine** 81.483 (September 1870): 281.

The wide popularity of Miss Alcott’s “Little Women” excited high expectations of her new book; and she has not disappointed her readers. In several points, indeed, we prefer the “Old-Fashioned-Girl” to her predecessors. She talks less slang than they, while she has the same sweetness and purity of motive. We shall give a more particular notice next month in our Table.
We are overrun with books for children, and have often had occasion to lament that there was hid among them but a grain of wheat for a bushel of chaff. It is, therefore, with real pleasure that we greet a new volume from the authoress of “Little Women.” Miss Alcott has a faculty of entering into the lives and feelings of children that is conspicuously wanting in most writers who address them; and to this cause, to the consciousness among her readers that they are hearing about people like themselves, instead of abstract qualities labelled with names, the popularity of her books is due. Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy are friends in every nursery and school-room; and even in the parlor and office they are not unknown; for a good story is interesting to older folks as well; and Miss Alcott carries on her children to manhood and womanhood, and leaves them only on the wedding-day.

Her new story is called “An Old-Fashioned Girl.” Polly Milton comes from her country home to visit her cousins in Boston. She has been brought up in the “old-fashioned way” of loving her parents and her brothers, caring little for the details of dress, and much for healthy out-of-door amusements. She finds her cousins, though the oldest, like Polly, is only fourteen, already girls of the period; miniature fine ladies, who talk of parties, dresses, and beaux, and care little for each other’s comfort or pleasure. The result of her long visit is to bring them to some sense of what is due to their parents, to each other, and to the people around them, and to shame them out of much vanity and folly. Here the book originally ended; but the authoress was induced by petitions from many readers to pass over a few years and bring her characters before us in opening womanhood. Polly is no less interesting at twenty than at fourteen, but the rest of the story we will not spoil in the telling. Its morality is healthy, without unnatural feeling of any sort; but we have one fault to find. It is possible, of course, that many city homes contain children like Polly’s cousins, but as a picture of the usual life of our city boys and girls, we do not recognize its accuracy. Only a very careless mother would let her children behave in some things as the young Shaws behaved; and there is a dash of vulgarity as well as hardness in their lives that makes us fear that Miss Alcott has been unfortunate in her experience of Boston life. No boy, for instance, in a refined family would be allowed to call his grandmother “the old lady,” and no girls could talk unreproved such slang as Miss Alcott’s girls, even the good ones, rattle off fluently. This, however, is but a single drawback to the pleasure and profit of reading “An Old-Fashioned Girl;” and we commend it heartily to mothers and children.
hearts the freshness of youth, will find in a recent new publication much to charm and delight. We allude to Miss Alcott’s *Old-Fashioned Girl*, published by Roberts Brothers, of Boston. As a delineator of youth, such as it is, in its everyday phases, Miss Alcott has no rival. Every one of her juvenile characters is depicted with a naturalness and an artistic spirit that leave little to be desired. Her “Old-Fashioned Girl,” to quote her own words, “is not intended as a perfect model . . . [remainder of sentence omitted].”

A very amusing and entertaining book, and particularly welcome at a time when the “girls of the period” would do better were they more frequently reminded of the good old-fashioned times when women were truly beautiful and honored, and when homes were places where husbands, wives and children were made happy, and where they learned to “love, know and help one another.”

Miss Alcott has employed her pen to good purpose in this well-told story. The characters are not overdrawn. The pictures of home-life are natural. Many of the domestic and fashionable fathers of the time are delineated truthfully; and it does the heart good to form the acquaintance of such a commonsense, frank, rosy-cheeked, high-minded, noble girl, as Miss Milton. It is a capital book for girls.

**[Indianapolis Evening News?]** ([1870?]). Clippings File.

A good many months ago, and, if we remember rightly, during a trying period of the war, or immediately after it, we tried one day to read Miss Alcott’s “Hospital Sketches.” Something must have been the matter, either with us or with the book, for it was voted stupid; and Miss Alcott was consigned to oblivion as a young lady who had more pretension than brains, and whose “cheek” was much better exhibited in travelling from hospital to hospital, than in telling about it afterwards. Our opinion of Miss Alcott has undergone such a change in the last two days that we feel called upon not only to take off our hat to her publicly, as an evidence that the army of her admirers is increased by at least one recruit, but we promise at the first opportunity to hunt up “Hospital Sketches” and read it again. We confess it will be done with a misgiving that perhaps a bad dinner, an ugly day, or an unpleasant business, may have had more to do with the unfavorable opinion than the book itself, but justice ought to be done even at the eleventh hour and no matter how unpalatable, it shall be. This change has been brought about by reading “An Old-Fashioned Girl,” and like every other new convert, we are exceedingly zealous that everybody may be of our way of thinking, that we are ready to say almost anything. But the book doesn’t require any praising; it commends itself with its freshness and vivacity, its charming simplicity and its
sterling good sense. It is of course faulty, for in what human works can not flaws be picked? and there are some inconsistencies; but – bother all these little inaccuracies; who cares for them, or who thinks of them while reading the book? Who has any business to wrangle about elegance of construction, or thinness of plot and want of elaboration, so long as there is not a man, woman or child in the country who can read the book and not be influenced by it? As the girls say, “It is perfectly splendid,” and it ought to be taken into every house, and read and re-read. If Miss Alcott doesn’t make a fortune out of it, merit will never have been worse appreciated. Every mother, who reads The News ought to buy a copy, read it, and give it to her children. We warrant the dust will not accumulate on many copies.

“Miss Alcott’s New Book for Old and Young Folks.” [Chicago newspaper?] ([1870?]). Clippings File.

Recent literary events, in a number of instances which we could cite very readily if it were necessary, have demonstrated that a second effort in any particular vein that has been found successful is not only experimental but hazardous. In fact, such second effort has proved to be a mere repetition in most cases, and has failed to satisfy those who had built up their expectations on the pleasure which they had found in the original. That a feeling of this kind should be inseparable from the circumstance of exaggeration in the first instance is natural, and Miss Alcott will hardly escape it. But, aside from this, there is little doubt that her “Old-Fashioned Girl” will find as many friends as her “Little Woman” found, and the latter will introduce the former to many old acquaintances who will welcome her right heartily, and enjoy her society to the extent that the gifted author has given it. “An Old-Fashioned Girl” is another one of the few samples of juvenile literature that has the intelligence, the humanity and the sympathy to render it as pleasant to mature minds as to the quick appreciation of youth. While its scenes are those of everyday life, its characters such as an intimate social condition reveals, and its dialogue of unaffected simplicity, it can in no wise be called commonplace. While its whole composition is of incidents and details, there is an unconscious avoiding, of all that would be tame, tedious, or uninteresting. There is no filling-up by means of rhetorical descriptions of places or characters; there is no silly conversation on the universal

[Ladies’ Review?] ([1870?]). Clippings File.

We do not remember anything like the rush after this little book set a-going by the enthusiasm about “Little Women.” It proves that the young people’s hearts are in the right place, and that the good and simple, the pure and sweet, commends itself to them as best. The Old-Fashioned Girl brings a fresh breath of truth and nature into the close atmosphere of city life and makes a delightful contrast, which is easily seen and admired when it is painted [pointed?] out so clearly.

The girls of the period, with their rich fathers enabling them to live useless, aimless lives, are joyless, insipid creatures compared with Polly’s poorer friends – that bright bevy of self-reliant girls whom necessity has stimulated to cultivate their talents and to have aspirations.
topic of the weather; there is a constant, though unobtrusive, tendency to select those things in life which would naturally interest one, whether as a participant in the events that happen, or as a simple “looker-on in Venice.” Each one of the characters develops itself, and it has in no instance been found necessary for the author to illustrate it by parenthetizing whole pages, which in history or science would be used as foot-notes. Unless every-day life is tedious in its most attractive phases, Miss Alcott’s new book can scarcely fail to please, for she has shown the rare faculty of connecting a series of matter-of-fact incidents that may and actually do occur, without any of the monotony that attaches to the best and liveliest of social or domestic circles. We think too, that it was scarcely necessary for her to apologize for having made a sort of sequel to the original of “An Old-Fashioned Girl,” which was simply a few animated sketches of the visit of a country girl to city friends. The most popular, and even some of the best of novelists have made a practice of bringing up the characters to the time of marrying off the hero and heroine, and this is what Miss Alcott has done. But she has done more, because she has followed her characters back to their earliest formation, and has watched their real development, which novelists rarely do. It must be a satisfaction to the little folks to know something of the more mature life of Polly, and Tom, and Fanny, and Syd., and, if so, it is quite as gratifying for the more mature readers to have paved the way for a true appreciation of the young ladies and gentlemen of the romance by any intimacy with their childhood. Are we not more interested in the lives of those whom we have jostled on our knees or rocked in their cradles, than in those whom we learn to know at an age of 20 years? It is in the same way that greater concern will be felt in the latter pages of Miss Alcott’s new book because of the child-life that has been made familiar in the earlier pages. The story is as simple as possible, and yet, in spite of the fact that almost any one of the score of chapters may be read singly with satisfaction, then [there] seems to be no one of them that does not prompt a further pursuit. This connected interest is probably due rather to the pleasure that has been found in what has been read than in any curiosity excited as to what may come; for there is no mystery, no sudden shifting of scenes, no temporary dropping of the curtain at some suggestive but inexplicable situation – in fact, none of the ordinary clap-trap, lowered lights, and blue-fire that are brought into the conventional novel, or even the hair-breadth escapes, and terrible adventures, and fairy interpositions that make up the staple of sensational literature for the children. A calm sea and pretty smooth sailing are the circumstances of this voyage of life, and yet the ripples in the water are so beautiful, and the fluttering of the white sails so pleasant, and the sky so bright, and the atmosphere so invigorated, and the little crew so carefully, naturally, and kindly managed, that there are few monotonous things, and few dreary moments. Polly is not the good little girl of the Sunday-school books, but a girl of thought, sensibilities, and propensities. She overcomes the temptations to folly, because she has been reared in a straight forward, self-dependent way, and because her actions are guided by the good principles which have been instilled into her mind from earliest childhood. She is not an unnatural child or over-saintly woman, – too good for this world, – but she sometimes gives way to the false pride, the little vanities, and the natural envy of her common humanity; as when, a child, she writes harsh things about the companions who have slighted her, or when, a young woman,
she indulges for a single night the fascina-
tion of dress, admiration, excitement, and even incipient flirtation. But she is, throughout her career, the type of a true and brave little woman, battling for the good without any heroics, and making herself useful and beloved without ostenta-
tion of effort. Nor is she one of your wild, milk-and-water, aimless, and brainless sort of girls. She is intelligent, eager to learn, quick to assert her rights, spirited in temper, but generous to for-
give, and, though self-sacrificing, knows her rights and maintains them. We scarcely know which period of her life to admire most, – that in which she undergoes the taunts of the children, or that in which her womanly fortitude induces her to give up brilliant opportunities. Each has its re-
ward, – the former in the love and re-
spect of all who have been associated with her, the latter in the prize of the husband she had chosen, and in the reform for which she had worked. A healthy, vigorous, romping, rosy-cheeked girl, with none of the pouting of a spoiled child; an industri-
ous, independent, loving, and lovable woman, without any of the pining and self-martyrdom of the heroines of French novels; moral without preach-
ing, gay without frivolity, sober without stupidity, – intelligent, appreciative, and sympathec, – our “Old-Fashioned Girl” is a model, without any of the formality, stiffness, or intrusion of the class of mod-
els. Tom can be scarcely less a favorite than Polly. A jolly, careless, rough boy that grows up to dandified habits as the col-
lege junior; an extravagant fellow who is expelled from college, and helps bring his father to ruin; but with a sub-
stratum of principle and a foundation of heart upon which a new manhood is built up, – the picture is constantly fresh, varied, and attractive. In Arthur Sydney, with his native politeness, his kind heart and subse-
quent manliness; in Fanny, with the follies of the fashionable set and the goodness of heritage which reversion in fortune devel-
ops; in Maud, whose character is molded under the influence of Polly; in the busi-
nesslike Mr. Shaw, the complaining Mrs. Shaw, the good, old grandmother[,] the prac-
tical Miss Mills and the frivolous Trix and Belle, – Miss Alcott has given types of social life that every one will recognize, while their associations bring them out in harmony with human nature, and yet to the entire satisfaction of the reader.

Here, then, we have another book that avoids equally the superstitious and the adventurous of juvenile literature, and the improbabilities and the indecencies of the average fiction of the day. Though Miss Alcott has brought her little heroes and heroines up to a marrying age, there is not a suspicion of adultery, no coarse-
ness in language, nor vulgarity in action, aside from the common speech and man-
ners of fashionable society, with which the author shows herself to be as well ac-
quainted as with the old-time fashions of girlhood and womanhood. Yet there is not a chapter that does not, in some word or circumstance, appeal to human sympa-
thy and human emotions, and we think that the interest will be as keen, if not as morbid, as that taken in any sensational romance of the period. The influence of dress; the contrasts of friendship; the im-
portance of little things; the tender remi-
niscence of a dead brother; the healthful affection for a living brother; the secrets of a woman’s heart; the trials and plea-
sures of poverty; the pangs of parting; the changes of time and absence; the gentle-
ess of spirit which misfortune may bring forth, – hundreds of affecting bits of nature are colored with truthfulness and make up a continuity of interest. Much of this truthful effect has been attained, too, by the naturalness of Miss Alcott’s style, which adapts itself readily and graphi-
cally to the characters. Sometimes it is too
loose, as when she uses the awkward phrases that conjoin “each” or “everyone” with the possession of “their,” but usually it is neither inaccurate nor inelegant, while it is always easy, fluent, and attractive. We cannot but think that “An Old-Fashioned Girl” will increase the number of admirers that “Little Women” had already won for Miss Alcott.

N., J. Eastern Argus ([1870]). Clippings File.

Already, no less than fifteen thousand copies of this charming little book have been sold – in advance of publication.

We have have here, in addition to the tenderness, the great good sense, and irrepressible humor, which characterized the author’s “Little Women” and “Hospital Sketches,” uncommon displays of dramatic power, both serious and pathetic, which we were hardly prepared for.

The book deserves more than a passing notice, therefore; but we must be very brief, and our selection must be like the patterns they snip off, at their spring openings, in our daintiest of shops. For example:

“And here the old lady stopped, out of breath, with her cap askew, her spectacles on the tip of her nose, and her knitting much the worse for being waved enthusiastically in the air, while she hung over on the arm of her chair, shrilling [shrilly] cheering our imaginary Lafayette.”

“The girls clapped their hands, and Tom hurrahed with all his might, saying when he got his breath,

“Lafayette was a regular old trump; I always liked him,” p. 111. And what can be more natural and spirited than this?

They are at a party, Tom’s first. “Oh thunder! muttered Tom, and having split the detested gloves, in dragging them on, he nerved himself for the effort, walked up to Polly, made a stiff bow, stuck out his elbow, and said, solemnly, “May I have the pleasure, Miss Milton?”

He did it as much like the big follows [fellows], as he could, and expected Polly to be impressed. But she wasn’t a bit; for after a surprised look, she laughed in his face, and took him by the hand, saying heartily, –

“Of course you may; but don’t be a goose, Tommy.” p. 132.

And here is an incident which must have been taken from life. Polly is travelling with some household furniture and with a pie in her lap. “The pillow was easily disposed [disposed] of,” she says, “but that pie! I do believe it was stowed away in every part of the wagon, and never staid anywhere. I found it in my lap; then on the floor; next upside down among the books, just on the point of coasting off a trunk into the road, and at last it landed in my rocking-chair.” p. 154.

And then too, just read a part of page 194, where Tom in blowing up the professors, had got his trousers burnt, while putting out the fire, and then, having represented his case to the faculty, had the money furnished him to buy a nice new pair; “but he got some cheap ones, with horrid great stripes in ‘em and always wore ’em to that particular class, which was too many for the fellows, they said, and with the rest of the money he had a punch party. Wasn’t it dreadful?” p. 194.

And now for a bit of startling common-sense.

To an embryo clergyman, Polly says, “Well, whatever you do, Will, don’t have a great costly church that takes so much money to build and support it, that you have nothing to give away. I like the plain old-fashioned churches, built for use, not show, where people met for hearty praying and for preaching [preaching]; and where
everybody made their own music, insted [instead] of listening to opera singers, as we do now."[" p. 200

"Where everybody made their own music!" Why not talk English; and say where the people made their own music, if you don’t half like to pay [say] where everybody makes his own music, or his and her own music!

But this, by the way, is a common fault with our charming authoress. For example on page 219, she proposes to put down “any one that assumes to set themselves up;” and again pp. 240, she says, “everybody is more influenced by it than they know;” and yet again, pp. 284, “everybody shows you their good side;["] pp. 337, “Every one exerted themselves[;]” pp. 357,[,] “It is bad enough to love some one who don’t love you; but to have them told of it is perfectly awful.” How many ones were there? We should like to know.

But, now that our hand is in, we have another bone to pick with our delightful friend, whose English is generally so pure and fresh and sparkling, that, we have no idea of either overlooking, or forgiving such blunders – or rather such vulgarisms.

On p. 230 – we have this passage. “Polly sprinkled crumbs to the doves, who come daily.” Can it be that we are mistaken? Is, or is not who a personal pronoun? You might as well say, a flower who, as a dove who, notwithstanding the example of Washington Irving and half a dozen other respectable authorities [authorities].

And here too, we have something for which Miss Alcott may plead the example of no less a personage than Lord Byron himself. “He is like a weed says the poet, flung upon oceans verge,” or something of the sort – I forget the words – “there let him lay” – not eggs – but himself, and our friend here says p. 197. “He laid down with a rebellious air.” Was it eider-down, or swans-down?

Frequently too, she writes who for whom, as “who do you think I meant?” p. 256 “Is that who you meant,” p. 306, and who have I but my other sister Polly,” p. 342 – all which goes to show that we have not followed the example of Sydney Smith, who was afraid to read a book before he reviewed it, lest he might be prejudiced. But enough. Were she not so well worth snubbing, and had she not such plentiful, and such mischievous examples to lead her astray, and confirm her in these wretched aberrations, we should say: There, there! That'll do &c., &c.

And now for something more serious, and something worthier of the high position Miss Alcott has already taken – reminding us continually, by her triumphant self-assertion, of Miss Mitford when she burst upon us with “Our Village,” centuries ago.

“I want to be strong minded in the real sense of the word,” says our Polly (p. 212), “but I don’t like to be called so, by people, who don’t understand my meaning” – That’s it! go it, my brave girl! And this, mind you, she says in reply to the remark that “a principle that can’t bear being laughed at, frowned on, and cold-shouldered, isn’t worthy of the name.” Brava!

Once more – says Trix (p. 223.) [“]I shouldn’t be surprised to hear of her preaching in the jail, adopting a nice, dirty little orphan, or passing round tracts at a Woman’s Right’s Meeting” – and why not, pray? for “Trix never could forgive Belle for having a lovely complexion, and so much hair of her own, that she never patronized either rats, mice, waterfalls, switches, or puff combs” – or, it is to be hoped the monstrous fashion of the Feejee islanders, whereby our young brunettes are all changed to quadroons, or something worse, and the rest of our white girls to mulattos and half“breeds
And now for the “consummate flower” of all this familiar teaching. “Some time ago, we got into a famous talk about what women should be, and Becky said she’d show us her idea of the coming woman. There she is, as you say, bigger, lovelier, and more imposing than any we see now a days, and at the same time, she is a true woman. See what a fine foehed [forehead]; yet the mouth is both firm and tender, as if it could say strong, wise things, as well as teach children, and kiss babies.”

That’s the talk, my dear! And having said this, we stop, in the belief, that one who is capable of saying so many “strong, wise things” herself, is the very person to set others a going.

That our women are beginning to feel their strength and reverence themselves, instead of walking the earth as heretofore with “hidden wings,” we take to be self evident. And we may be sure that the “Old-fashioned Girl,” will be found leading the forlorn hope, when the trumpet sounds for the onset, and she sees the enemies’ works right before her.

The three hundred and seventy-eight pages in a neat illustrated volume entitled “An Old-Fashioned Girl,” by the author of “Little Women,” published by Messrs. Roberts Brothers, will be eagerly welcomed by a large constituency. The 45,000 purchasers of “Little Women” will, we presume, all be “on hand” to enjoy the quaint portraiture of character, the racy truth to nature, and the telling incidents and trenchant narrative of this new book from the same pen. The reader will not rarely flinch under the faithful exhibit of the odd corners and little shifts and evasions of human nature as laid open to the light by Miss Alcott, but he will read on, and wish there was more to read.
happy way it holds up a mirror to parents, in which they see themselves as they are too often, and as they might be, in their home relations; and a mirror to girls, in which they see their follies and their possibilities portrayed. The author fully understands what she is writing about. Indeed she might be called the apostle of nature, for she is using her good pen to call us back from the absurdities and extravagancies of fashion to the healthfulness and simplicity of nature. Her interesting Polly is not a child of the present style, introduced in her infancy to all the arts and graces of "polite society," and at the mature age of sixteen tired of life. But she comes from a plain, sweet home, whose law is love, and whose relatives are all noble and happy. The story of her teaching and self-reliant life in the city is very stimulating to girls who have the will and the ability to work for themselves. We would like to have every girl in the land read the story of this "old fashioned" heroine. It would do them all good.

There is something out of the common in that peculiar love with which we open our hearts to a new book from a favorite author. It is a sensation in which something closely akin to the solid comfort of a home-love is largely admixed. The hundred thousand pairs of eyes which have devoured "Little Women," have never seen the maiden-mother of that matchless household; but that maiden-mother has a guest-chamber royally furnished in every one of the hundred thousand happy, grateful hearts. We reason from the offspring toward the parent, upward; and whatever measure may contain our liking for the children, is instinctively enlarged and ennobled for the unseen mother.

Miss Alcott has a large and noble heart; chastened, cultured, softened, attuned, till its pulsations are like the harmonies of fields and woods. She does but think and feel and speak what her heart prompts, to gladden and satisfy us all.

This is the highest type of authorship; a dignity to which only the few attain. Its conditions exact the severest chastity of culture – mental, moral, social, especially emotional. As there are few households so thoroughly cultured that no coming of guests need change the order of individual behavior or of family method, so there are few authors who can win the high regard of a critical reader by simply writing what they most sincerely think, feel, and love.

Readers of "Little Women" will find in the "Old-Fashioned Girl" the same little women reappearing in new relations, and the same "splendid" Laurie under a new chrism. Instead, therefore, of merely absorbing the new volume at a sitting, it is likely that some thousands of readers will devour it in an hour so happy that it will seem but one elastic individual charm. Of the thousand and one epistles Miss Alcott has received from gratified readers, we are permitted to print one verbatim, which is a fair sample of the natural responses to a natural story:

"Chicago, March 12, 1870.
[end of clipping]
She possesses the winning faculty in a remarkable degree. Her stories are marked with a charming sprightliness, and a freedom which disdains not slang. They are pure in sentiment and of vigorous healthy tone. Hence we are not surprised to learn that her new volume, the “Old Fashioned Girl,” has already sold to the number of twenty thousand copies. Many readers pronounce it superior to “Little Women,” but that is saying altogether too much.

[Philadelphia Inquirer?] ([1870?]). Clippings File.

This charming and healthy story forms an admirable companion book to Miss Alcott’s last work, “Little Woman [Women].” The “Old-Fashioned Girl” is a charming young woman, born and reared in the country. She knows little of the frivolities of fashion, and her natural good sense and unaffected simplicity stand out in strong contrast with those of a city bred miss proficient in all the accomplishments that go to make up the young lady of good society.

[Philadelphia Post?] ([1870?]). Clippings File.

An author flushed and happy with the success of a [fi?rst] book, probably rarely realizes why permanent popularity depends more upon the second work than upon the one that made the lucky hit. Success is very independent of rules, and authors cannot prophesy to themselves whether the public will bear the working out of the same vein again, or whether they will succeed if they try one that is new. The standard of comparison is established in the first work, and they rise or fall by it. Judging “The Old-Fashioned Girl” thus by “Little Women,” for “Hospital Sketches” is simply a collection of previously published tales; it is not as good a book as we expected from Miss Alcott. It has the same sense of humor, the appreciations of natural social life, and talent in drawing character, but the fun never runs off with the reader; there is not the same exuberance of spirit, nor are the characters so real and lifelike. In the effort to make Fanny and Polly contrasts both are made unnatural, and Polly is so very “goody” that she is almost fit for the heroine of a Sunday-school book. The descriptions of fashionable life might have been drawn by a recluse, while we cannot imagine a set of sensible feminine girls living in such a Bohemianish way as to violate all the housekeeping instinct of their sex by eating off of shells, cleaning a paint-knife in a pot of ivy for table use, and having brown-paper napkins in the course of common daily life. For the rest there is a refreshing breeziness about the description of such real independent life. The book is undoubtedly entertaining and good, but, as we have said, not equal to that very good “Little Women.”

[The Presbyterian?] ([1870?]). Clippings File.

A genuine, true, good book, which has no fault, except that it leaves us discontented, and wistful to know where “Polly” is to be found. She has become a rara avis in these days of kid-gloved and bejewelled babies and prematurely grown up little girls. When the old-fashioned “Polly” comes back, with her primrose freshness,
her unconscious beauty, and her charming, simple manner, she will win all hearts in a way that will drive the “girl of the period” to absolute despair.

[Rochester newspaper?] ([1870?]). Clippings File.

We have before spoken of this charming little book by the bright authoress of Little Women. The sale of the latter work was unexampled, but from present indications the Old Fashioned Girl will achieve a still greater success than its predecessor. At Thomas’ book store the original package was exhausted within a few days of its arrival, and now a new lot has arrived. The book is full of the hearty, honest spirit of nature, so refreshingly developed in Miss Alcott’s [Alcott’s] previous writings, and readily captivates the attention of the reader.

Sunday School Times. Quoted in advertisement ([1870?]). Clippings File.

It deserves and should have a reading in the homes of rich and poor all over the land.

[Standard?] ([1870?]). Clippings File.

The author of “Little Women” could not fail to write an entertaining book, and her new story will fully sustain her reputation. “An Old-Fashioned Girl” presents charming contrasts between real politeness and good breeding, and the artificial substitutes for them which are too common. The dialogue of the work is lively and natural, and the contrasts between the characters sharply drawn. It is full of good things and is sure to have a large circulation.

[Washington Herald?] ([1870?]). Clippings File.

Miss Alcott’s new story is a charming protest against that wonderful phenomenon of feminine progress toward freedom, “The Girl of the Period.” Her “Old Fashioned Girl” comes before us endowed with all the old-fashioned virtues. She is intelligent, refined, modest, and good. She exemplifies all the perfections of our grandmothers, while exhibiting few of the imperfections to which female human nature has been liable in all ages. The simple story of her girlhood, dawning womanhood, and happy love is told in a way which commands the reader’s tender interest through to the pleasant ending. It is a healthy, bright, sunshiny story, not a philosophical nor deep one. We do not think Miss Alcott’s portraiture of the girl of the period a true nor just one, any more than we believe the morals of young women now are worse than they were in the last generation. Like all tales with a moral, its artistic effect is marred by the necessity for “putting things” so as to make the premises sustain the argument. But the merits of the book are so great, and its tone so wholesome, that we must not quarrel with its little feminine one-sidedness. Our sympathies are with the brilliant, wayward, freedom-loving, development-seeking girl of the period against all her
assailants. But her worst enemies are the writers of such vicious books as “Guy Livingstone” and “Red as a Rose is She.” And it is because Miss Alcott’s books are so far removed from these in spirit, tone, and purpose, that we thank her so heartily for them, and wish so earnestly that they may be read by every true-hearted girl, whether of the period or of the older fashion, which is passing way amid the changes wrought by modern progress.

([1870?]). Clippings File.

Miss Alcott has secured a hold of the reading public such as will make anything emanating from her pen draw patronage and assure purchasers of a treat. Her “Little Women” has gained a success that constitutes one of the most marked phenomena of our recent light literature, and the qualities that she there developed were such as gave promise of other products equally rich and peculiar. Her “Old-Fashioned Girl” exhibits the same excellences and attractions as its predecessor. Polly Milton is her heroine, and she deserves the honor, – a gleeful, bright, merry, sincere, straightforward young miss, – till she becomes a young lady, – who is not spoiled by the fashionable frivolities among which she is thrown; but works for her living, weaving genuine romance into the web of her practical life, refusing to be spoiled by the pitiable follies that thrive in the fashionable school and get embodiment among most of her associates, keeping her heart unsullied, scorning shams and eschewing coquetry, rebuking pretense and shaming heartlessness by her sincere spirit and womanly ways, helping the needy and inspiring the aimless with a better purpose, and marrying at last the somewhat rough and harum-scarum Tom, who carries a manly heart under his rough exterior and his blunt manners. There is something genuinely healthy and quickening in Miss Alcott’s characters; and her philosophy of life, which comes out spontaneously in her pictures and her colloquies, is such as the girls of the period would be wonderfully improved by accepting and applying. It would give us solid substance instead of worthless polish, and do an hundred times more for the improvement of women than the bestowment of the ballot. Miss Alcott deserves the heartfelt thanks of the whole reading public, both for the rare literary pleasure which she has furnished and for the high lessons she has taught. Her Old-Fashioned Girl will keep an ideal before the frivolous young ladies of the period that cannot wholly fail of doing them good, both by the rebukes which it administers and the better impulse which it gives.

([1870?]). Clippings File.

A new book by the author of “Little Women” will be eagerly welcomed by thousands of readers. Roberts Brothers have brought out Miss Alcott’s Old Fashioned Girl” [sic] in a style to match her previous volumes, and it sells for $1.50. The story is vivacious in style and amusingly presents the contrast between a well brought up country girl and a city young lady, while Tom, the hero, is every inch a boy.

([1870?]). Clippings File.

This is a book which will be largely sought for by the thousands who have hung with
delight over the pages of Miss Alcott’s “Little Women.” Polly, the old fashioned girl, who enters the story at the age of 14, is a sensible girl brought up in a wholesome country home, not a model of perfection but a decided improvement upon the “girl of the period” who is ashamed of the old ways which make women truly beautiful and honored and through her, render home what it should be, — a happy place where parents, brothers, and sisters learn to know and love and help each other. Her girlish adventures in a visit to Fanny, a city young lady, who has a brother “Tom” who may be considered the hero of the book, and a sequel six years after, in which Tom and Polly appear in the role of lovers, with a happy ending, make up the story.

Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine 110.1172 (October 1871): 442.

We have left ourselves no room to consider the crowd of other slim, and, on the whole, pleasant volumes which lie before us. For instance, the works of Miss Alcott, the first of which, ‘An Old-Fashioned Girl,’ is a protest against the extraordinary rôle of young-ladyhood in America, where girls are engaged to little lovers at six or seven, and where dress, jewellery, and flirtation begin in the nursery. ‘Little Women’ and ‘Little Men’ are moral stories of the same class, where the dialect is all very choice American, and the amount of absolute goodness and Christian virtue revealed to us is enough to save a great many Sodoms, and is, we trust, as true to fact as it is agreeable to read of. The ‘Old-Fashioned Girl’ affords us, besides, a very queer sketch of the manners and habits of the young women of art and literature who have set up for themselves to live a jolly and independent life on the model of their “brothers,” the artist and journalist class, which we should have liked to quote. There is the most amusing and conscious air of sham in the whole proceeding, which makes the importance with which it is produced, and the weight the author attaches to it, as a picture of the new and higher life, infinitely funny, and proves how curiously capable the inexperienced mind is of placing, without knowing it, a bit of utter unreality in the heart of a picture full of uncompromising realism. To such a writer, what she sees is safe ground; but what she imagines, very doubtful indeed.


Woman has long been reprehended for her love of dress; yet she dresses to please man, as well as satisfy her intuitive ideas of the laws of harmony. . . . Now we hear them prating about the good old times when women wore calico gowns, spun, wove, and knitted. In those days, also, men wore smock-frocks, sewed [sowed] the seed with the hand, and gathered it with a sickle; yet brain-work has done away with this muscular work, and now machines do our work. Furthermore, should the Old-fashioned Girl, however attractive in Miss Alcott’s book, make her appearance at a party, she would figure à la wallflower; while the Girl of the Period, in
ruffles, crimps, curls, and laces, would be surrounded by admirers. It needs little discrimination to see that well-dressed women are the leading spirits every-where; and this is as it should be.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

*Berkshire County Eagle* [Pittsfield, Mass.]
The Commonwealth 8.6 (9 October 1869): [1]:5. Notices serialization.

*Berkshire County Eagle* [Pittsfield, Mass.]
*Littell’s Living Age* 105.1350 (16 April 1870): 129.
*Eclectic Magazine* n.s.11.6 (June 1870): 764.
LITTLE MEN: LIFE AT PLUMFIELD WITH JO'S BOYS (1871)
"Little Men, or Life at Plumfield with Joe’s Boys: Miss Alcott’s New Book.”

Lawrence Daily American 12.121 (22 May 1871): [1]:6-[1]:7-[2]:1.

We have received from the publishers, Messrs. Roberts Brothers, Boston, the opening chapters of Miss Louise Alcott’s new volume, now in press and to be issued June 1st, and if the remainder is one-half as charmingly written, the young people have in store, even a greater treat than they could have anticipated. The best evidence of recovered health is found in these pages, which sparkle with the genial sunshine of the Italian sky beneath which they were written, – and we cannot resist giving our readers a little foretaste of the feast awaiting them.

Joe’s school seems to have been conducted upon the principle that the natural exuberance of spirit and merriment among the boys, need not be wholly stifled or suppressed; that there was a time to play, and laugh and frolic as well as to study and seriousness. Nat Blake, a homeless, friendless orphan, procuring a precarious living as a street musician, has been sent, by one in whom his appearance awakened an interest, to the school at Plumfield, where he has been dried and warmed after the rain through which he had come, had eaten a hearty supper, with the boys, during which they had found out that Ned [Nat] could play on the violin, Jo noticing the brightening of his eye, as he spoke of that instrument.

Here let us quote: –

So, after supper, when the lads flocked into the school-room for more “high jinks,” Mrs. Joe appeared with a violin in her hand, and after a word with her husband, went to Nat, who sat in a corner watching the scene with intense interest. [33 additional paragraphs omitted.]


In Miss Louisa Alcott’s new book which is to appear next week, about the time she is returning from her European tour, she relates the married life of her heroine “Jo,” who here figures as the matron of a boarding school, of which her husband, the German Professor Bhaer, is the master. In it are related also the fortunes of her nephews, the children of “John Brooke,” now, alas! left fatherless. The story opens with a description of the school at a place called “Plumfield,” which may be Concord and may not be. When a new boy arrives to enter the school, – a poor little fellow named “Nat Blake,” this is what he sees: –

THE BOARDING SCHOOL.

The house seemed swarming with boys who were beguiling the rainy twilight with all sorts of amusements. [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

And here is Jo herself, at her own fireside and among the boys that were under her care: –

JO AS A MATRON.

She was not at all handsome, but she had a merry sort of face, that never seemed to have forgotten certain childish ways and looks, any more than her voice and manner had; . . . [remainder of 9 quoted paragraphs omitted].
The evening is wound up by a “pillow-fight,” which is here described in fiction, perhaps for the first time.

THE PILLOW FIGHT.

‘What a very nice school this is’ observed Nat, in a burst of admiration. [Remainder of 8 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

The whole book is taken up with the school and family adventures of these boys at Plumfield, and it is evident that Miss Alcott, as her custom is, has drawn many of her incidents from real experiences in her own family. One chapter, the nineteenth, is devoted to the death and character of “John Brooke,” the brother-in-law whom Miss Alcott (and all who ever knew him) esteemed so highly. This is almost the only pathetic portion of the volume, but all along there are touches of pathos as well as of fun. The practice of Mr Alcott, in his Boston schools thirty-five years ago, to allow his boys to ferule him instead of inflicting the blows on them, was adopted by Mr Bhaer in his school, and we have this description of the way it operated on Nat Blake and the other boys. Nat had a weakness for telling fibs, which was the offense punished by his teacher in the manner described.

LINGUA VICARIA MANUS.

The boys looked at one another in silence for a minute, then Tommy slipped out, and peeping in at the half-closed blinds, beheld a sight that quite bewildered him. [Remainder of 22 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

The new story will be eagerly welcomed by hundreds of thousands of readers who have followed the fortunes of Miss Alcott’s “Little Women.” It has the same characteristic merits and defects as her former books, but, like them, is sure to be immensely popular. It will be published in Boston by Roberts and in London by Sampson Low, and Miss Alcott will receive a copyright both here and in England.

The London edition makes nearly 340 pages, without illustrations; the Boston edition has about 40 more pages, being printed in a larger type, and four charming woodcuts from Miss Greene’s designs,—the best of hers we have ever seen. The sale of the book in this country promises to be something prodigious. It is to come out on the first day of June, but already the first two editions of ten and five thousand are taken up in advance orders, a single firm in New York ordering 2500 copies. Consequently there will be some delay in the furnishing of copies to those booksellers who have not sent in advance orders, and for the whole month of June it is probable that the book cannot be supplied so fast as it will be ordered. It will attract a somewhat different class of readers from those who have delighted so much in Miss Alcott’s former books, and will extend her enviable reputation still more widely on both sides of the ocean. Miss Alcott, who has been spending some weeks in England, sailed for home, it is supposed, on the 18th inst., and will reach her home in Concord perhaps the very day that her book sets forth on its travels from Boston. She left home just as her “Old-Fashioned Girl” was published, and now this new volume is ready to welcome her back. It contains none of her foreign observations, for which we may look to some future book.


The thousands of little and big readers of Little Women are doubtless eagerly
looking for the story of “Jo’s Boys,” so long ago promised by Miss Alcott, the delightful historian of the little folk; and they will be pleased to learn that it will be out early in June. I have chanced to see the advance sheets, and run hurriedly through the book. It is called *Little Men: Life at Plumfield with Jo’s Boys*. I have no doubt it will be devoured as rapturously as its predecessor, but I shall be surprised if it is liked as well. It is pleasingly written, quaint and droll occasionally, natural and life-like, and has many points that will long be remembered and frequently quoted, but I am afraid many youthful critics, the severest of all, will decide as they did of *The Old-Fashioned Girl*, that it’s a little “too goody” in parts. Every boy will like it, however, especially those who possess a super-abundance of spirits, and are constantly getting into awkward scrapes, and constantly receiving cuffs and scowls as they pass along their rugged course, for such boys are thoroughly appreciated in it, and sympathized with; their pranks are only mildly censured, and their restlessness is endured. One of the best characters in the book, evidently one of the author’s most cherished pets, is just such a boy – Tommy Bangs by name:

“Out of school, ye Gods and little fishes! How Tommy did carouse!” [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

Joe’s school is a veritable “Boy’s Paradise,” and many an unappreciated younger will sigh as he reads the book, that there isn’t a Plumfield and a Father and Mother Rhaer [Bhaer] in the neighborhood of his home. Her boys have all sorts of pets, play at all sorts of homely and ingenious games, are indulged and entertained, make candy, pop corn, and roast apples on Winter evenings, get into lots of dreadful scrapes but never get “lickings” for them, (though punished, however, and roundly,) and have a rough and tumble, terrific pillow fight and nightgown parties every Saturday night. The book opens with a delightful picture of the boy’s home at Plumfield. Little Nat, a poor street musician, has been picked up by Uncle Lawrence and sent to Joe:

“A hospitable-looking house, with an old-fashioned porch with steps, and lights shining in many windows.” [Remainder of 6 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

Mrs. Jo will not be found much changed.

“She was not at all handsome, . . . [remainder of sentence omitted].”

Some of the best-liked characters of *Little Women* are occasionally introduced, and, in one of the closing chapters, the death of good John Brooke is touchingly told.

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We will not spoil the enjoyment of any of the million readers who will hail with delight the publication of this book, by giving even the barest sketch of its plot. It will be sufficient for us to say that it is, to a certain extent, a sequel to “Little Women,” and to supply a “taste of its quality” in the shape of liberal extracts from its pages. We will venture to explain, however, that it is a story of school-life. Prof. Bhaer, who, the readers of “Little Women” will remember, was fortunate enough to win Jo for
his wife, established a school at Plumfield; and it is the story of nearly a year’s life in this institution that is told in “Little Men.” Readers of Miss Alcott’s earlier books will need no assurance as to the brightness and interest of this, beyond the statement that the school was composed of twelve boys, of ten to fourteen years of age, with three little girls thrown in for leaven, and glorious Jo for head and soul of the household. Jo’s theory of education was peculiar; but its success at Plumfield was unquestionable. She loved boys, and believed that they can best be made good by being made happy. How she made them happy, the reader will learn from this book, which is one of the jolliest and most wholesome stories we ever read. The ideas advanced in it about the government and education of children deserve to be read by every parent and teacher, nine-tenths of whom can learn much about boy-nature from its delightful pages.

One of the first sights that astonished Nat, a new-comer, at Plumfield, was

A NIGHT-GOWN PARTY.
“A momentary lull in the aquatic exercises was followed by the sudden appearance of pillows flying in all directions, hurled by white goblins, who came rioting out of their beds.”

TOMMY BANGS.
“Tommy Bangs was the scapegrace of the school.”

THE BOY-GARDEN.
“‘Once upon a time,’ began Mr. Bhaer in the dear old-fashioned way, ‘there was a great and wise gardener who had the largest garden ever seen.’”


“Dear Jo,” wrote an old protégé of Mr. and Mrs. Bhaer’s, “here is a case after your own heart. This poor lad is an orphan, sick and friendless. He has been a street musician. . . . [reviewer’s ellipsis] I think there is something in him. Give him a trial.” Readers of “Little Women” will remember Jo and his model school at Plumfield, where poor children are taught, not only how to read and to write, but how to amuse and humanize themselves. In this establishment, where each boy has a little garden of his own, a share in a menagerie of small pets, and various privileges not to be found in ordinary schools, poor Nat Blake soon makes himself quite at home; and in the course of time becomes a great favourite with Aunt Jo and her family of odd boys. Very delightful and very natural is the way in which the social characteristics of these boys is described. We see them at school, at church, in the garden, in the fields – learning, praying, working, playing, but always improving from rude, uncared-for waifs into useful and respectable members of society. The object of the book is evidently not so much to show what is, but what might be, done in school-reformatories, orphan asylums, &c.; and though written especially for American readers, all the suggestions are applicable to parents, guardians, and teachers on this side of the Atlantic; and if they would just try the experiment supposed to be carried out successfully at Plumfield, they might, after a while, exclaim with motherly Mrs Jo—“Dear me! if men and women would only trust, understand, and help one another as my children do, what a capital place the world would be!” For – as Miss Alcott prettily puts
it – “love is a flower that grows in any soil . . . [remainder of sentence omitted].” “Little Men” is a book that may well be recommended for adoption by our recently-formed School Boards, as one of the very few stories about children that children can really understand and admire, and that adults can read with both pleasure and profit.

**Boston Daily Advertiser**

117.130 (3 June 1871): [2]:3.

Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s long-promised story, *Little Men*, the sequel to “Little Women,” is now ready. It is published in uniform style with the other works of its author. We suppose there are few who read young folks’ books at all who have not read “Little Women,” and who, when they know that most of the personages of that story reappear in the new one as actors in different scenes, will not be eager to read it as soon as may be. Miss Alcott’s ability to write good stories is no longer questioned, and we will not dull the edge of pleasure by exposing the contents of this volume before readers get a chance at it.

**Taunton Daily Gazette**

35.129 (3 June 1871): 2:1.

This is one of Miss Alcott’s delightful little volumes, uniform edition with “Little Women,” and other charming works recently published by Roberts Brothers, for their many readers. “Professor Bhaer,” having opened a private school at Plumfield, Aunt “Jo,” who, when a girl, was half a boy herself, is now in her element with a baker’s dozen of boys around her. The book introduces most of the characters in “Little Women,” as actors in different vocations of life.

**Boston Daily Evening Transcript**

44.12,624 (3 June 1871): [1]:4.

“Little Men,” to be published on Monday, can be found at Piper & Co.’s, and no doubt all over the country likewise, following the footsteps of “Little Women.” It will require 25,000 copies to supply the first demand, and to make this number of books, two and a half tons of paper have been printed. We do not purpose to tell here and now what a funny life Jo’s boys led at Plumfield. Nat said it was “a nice school,” and the youngsters will all agree with him, while they split their sides with laughter as they read this record of experience told in the irresistibly humorous way of the author of “Little Women.” Properly speaking, there is no story to the book beyond the every-day incidents of the lads. Not the least interesting feature of “Little Men,” are the educational ideas of the author, who has herself been a teacher, and who also illustrates the system practised by her father – the Rev. A. B. Alcott – more than thirty years since.

**Boston Daily Evening Transcript**

44.12,626 (5 June 1871): [1]:4.

Miss Alcott, in her new book, has evidently endeavored to make pleasant
reading of the plain, unsensational, homely events of common life, and to teach the little men now coming up to love bread and milk and be children as long as they can; under the impression that we have had enough of confectionery and rich diet in stories for the young. She is right and successful in her notion and her exemplification of it, and so the jolly naturalness of her youngsters who appear such real, genuine boys – and nothing but boys.


The announcement that *Little Men*, by Miss Alcott, would be published on the first of June, caused more lively interest among the fairer sex than any other piece of literary news since the holidays. The book is at length out, and many readers are already deep in its pages. It is more juvenile than *Little Women*, and is mainly about boys, who are not always such interesting creatures, but the author preserves her natural and fresh style and has woven a very pretty story. Jo in *Little Women*, it will be remembered, married a German professor, and afterwards with the good fortune not rare in fiction, became possessed of an estate in the country called Plumfield. The Professor establishes a boy’s school thereupon and the good couple carry out their benevolent, but somewhat Utopian ideas, through the pages of the present volume. We suppose it will be generally considered a duty to read it.

**New York Evening Mail. Quoted in advertisement in Boston Daily Evening Transcript 44.12,629 (8 June 1871): [3]:5.**

God bless this woman’s hand which out of a full heart does justice to the children! There is only one thing to be said about her books – that they are life itself, and no author can do better than the great Author of all. This is the secret of her success – copy it who can, all of you! God bless her that she knows the influence of good, and let her shame those who with her own glorious powers go down into the filth to wallow into it. With a living faith in humanity she points the children upward to their own better selves, knowing just how bad and just how good they can be, and how little things will turn the scale. A safe journey to her back to the loving little men and women of her own land, and may she live long to be a missionary to our children, ordained by the gift of God Himself.

**The Commonwealth 9.41 (10 June 1871): [1]:6.**

At last the long-expected book – full of the charming naturalness, sweet simplicity and tender sentiment so peculiarly portrayed by this author in her previous works. It is a companion piece to “*Little Women*,” and like that work destined to have a wonderful success. It is full of the aroma of New England – suggestive of winding roads, stone walls, big barns,
hospitable mansions, and the free, delicious life of youths full of honor, fun and spirit. It recalls one’s own experiences, and brings before us scores of the loved and lost whose counterparts look out from these pages. It is a tribute to goodness in human nature, from one who is herself the noble embodiment of the lessons she teaches. Old and young alike will find a charm in it which will continue to delight long after the perusal is completed.


The whole city has been agog for a few weeks past to know what sort of a book “Little Men” was to be, which was being so extensively advertised. Curiosity is now satisfied in knowing that it is a bright little juvenile work which will make the young people half crazy with delight. “Professor Bhaer,” having opened a private school at Plumfield, Aunt “Jo,” who, when a girl, was half boy herself, is now in her element with a baker’s dozen of boys around her. The book will be called “bully,” and the girls will think it “so jolly,” and all their pa’s and ma’s will laugh and cry over it in sympathy. More than 130,000 volumes of Miss Alcott’s books have been sold and a million of readers have been delighted and instructed in their perusal.


The “Little Women” have gone the way of little women since the world began. Joe has married. Her husband and she keep a boy’s private boarding school with a girl or two taken in to flavor and be flavored. These dozen boys are the “Jo’s Boys” of the title-page, and the methods and spirit of our old friend in managing, drawing out and building up these true-to-life youngsters, give the relish and the charm to the book. Were it written by any one but the author of “Little Women,” it would be voted a delightful volume. It is delightful, but it not so delightful as that was. Perhaps it would not be if it were just as good. Falling in love could hardly be the same sweet surprise the second time that it was the first. It would be cruel to Miss Alcott, and fearfully greedy of us, to ask her to make every successive volume from her pen as much better than the last as “Little Women” was better than “Moods.”

American Literary Gazette 17.4 (15 June 1871): 98.

The originality and humor with which Miss Alcott charmed the readers of her preceding works, is not wanting in her new book, yet it is certainly inferior to “Little Women” in freshness and vivacity. It is nevertheless full of fun and spirit, and the thousands of readers on both sides of the Atlantic, who have become interested in the career of “Jo” and her friends, will gladly renew the acquaintance.

Miss Alcott has taken advantage of the law by which American citizens may secure copyright for their books, both in America and throughout the British dominions, by residing on British soil when the book is simultaneously published in both countries. This also has the further
The advantage of making the book copyright throughout Europe, as nearly every country has an international copyright treaty with England. Curiously enough, this law only operates one way, and British subjects cannot by any arrangement secure copyright in England and America.

The volume contains several wood-cut illustrations, and it is issued in a binding uniform in appearance with “Little Women” and “An Old-Fashioned Girl.”

Hartford Daily Courant
35.143 (17 June 1871):
Sup. 1:6.

The Little Men of Miss Alcott is a book for the amusement of the young and the instruction of the old. The young will all read it, charmed by it as a plainly understood children’s story. Their elders will read it with a sense of its deeper meaning. It is indeed a contribution to the reformatory movement of the age, and the favorite Jo turns out to be one of its high priestesses. Here, gentlemen and ladies, is a model school at Plumfield, a houseful of a dozen boys of all sorts, a home for those who have been rescued out of various misfortunes, the unfortunate rich and the poor who have had no chance, presided over by Professor Bhaer and his wife, who is the Aunt Jo of Little Women. It is an odd school, but the wholesomest and best of which we have any report. And we recommend all school visitors to visit it, all philanthropists [philanthropists] to take note of it, and behold what may be done by the exercise of intelligence and love.

The sweet and beautiful spirit of the book have already made it double welcome in thousands of homes where the author is loved, so that the reviewer’s task is ended with the mere announcement of it. It has the vivacity and freshness of Little Women, though not the originality of the first part of that book, and it has in it a great lesson besides.

The New-York Times
20.6159 (17 June 1871):
2:1.

Miss Alcott, whose name has already become a household word among little people, will gain a new hold upon their love and admiration by this little book. It forms a fitting sequel to Little Women, and contains the same elements of popularity. It is not, and does not profess to be, a story, but, as the author says in the opening of one of the chapters, “a few scenes in the life at Plumfield for the amusement of certain little persons;” and she assures her readers that “most of the incidents are taken from real life, and the oddest are the truest, for no person, no matter how vivid an imagination he may have, can invent anything half so droll as the freaks and fancies that originate in the lively brains of little people.” Jo, who is an old favorite with all readers of Little Women, we find with her German husband, Mr. Bhaer, in charge of a school at Plumfield, which would delight the heart of any youngster who has had his ideas of schools formed in the famous institutions, private or public, which are the boast of our modern educational systems. She has a dozen boys and two girls in her charge, and this book is a picture of their life through a single season, from the beginning of Spring to the end of Autumn. A charming picture it is, too. The characters and condition of the children are varied, each being a type in its way, and they
present, in themselves and surroundings, just the kind of material that Miss Alcott delights to deal with. Dan, Nat, Tommy and Demi, with the two girls, Daisy and Nan, form what may be regarded as the “leading characters,” though the others in their degree contribute no unimportant part to the interest of the scenes. All but the first two and the last named are inmates at Plumfield when the reader is first introduced. Nat has been picked up in the streets of the city where he has been a wandering musician with his father, now dead, and is sent to Jo by Mr. Laurence, our old acquaintance “Laurie,” that she and Fritz may “care for his overtasked body, and help his neglected mind.” He is a slender, timid lad, very sensitive and grateful for kind treatment, and possessed of an ardent passion for music. Tommy is a mischievous, harum-scarum little fellow, always up to pranks, and forever getting his head thumped and his clothes torn. Demi is a studious and thoughtful young philosopher, fond of stories and full of childish fancies. Daisy, his sister, is a quiet, domestic little lady, full of all womanly graces in their virgin state. Nan comes to the school a wild hoyden, full of untrained impulses, but is gradually toned down to a very interesting, though spirited little woman, while Dan, who was the latest acquisition, brought in by Nat, who had known him in his unhappy city life, was at first a hard case, having been totally neglected, with all his good qualities obscured, and his bad nature in a high state of development. Him, too, the magic of Plumfield life finally subdued, though he had to be sent away once to a farmer, from whom he ran away, and, after much trouble, made his way back to Mother Bhaer, whose kindness and love brought out his better qualities, and slowly subdued his wayward spirit. With this material the author works like one who thoroughly understands the childish nature, and loves it with all its wild impulses and its desire to overlap the restraints with which older and cooler heads are apt to hedge it about. All the sports and little experiences of Plumfield are pictured in a lively and extremely fascinating way, which cannot fail to charm every reader, whether old or young. No adequate idea of the book can be obtained except by reading it through, and we will not attempt to convey an inadequate one.

The principal source of gratification of the critic in the perusal of Miss Alcott’s books consists in the fact that they form in themselves a new class of literature for young people, which is thoroughly wholesome and healthy. Albeit strict critical judgment might compel us to say that the life at Plumfield is a little too pure and good to be like anything to be found in this world – that it performs miracles upon the minds of children in the space of a few months, and that altogether it is likely to raise wishes and expectations in the mind with regard to school life that it is impossible to realize – nevertheless, it furnishes an ideal that it will benefit old and young to contemplate, and affords glimpses of life which are refreshing to the mind and heart. One faculty of which we have not spoken, but which will be expected by the readers of Miss Alcott’s former works, is the exquisite and delicate humor which pervades many passages. Every one knows what exceedingly droll things are said and done by children, but it is rare indeed that an author is found who can catch up and reproduce this phase of their life so finely as Miss Alcott has done. One or two instances in the volume before us will suffice to illustrate this quality. Daisy, in the character of Mrs. Shakespeare Smith, has a ball, to which a select few of the boys are invited. Tommy and Nat are discussing the great event together, when Nat says, “I never went to a ball; what do you have to do?”
“Oh, we just play be men, and set round stiff and stupid, like grown-up folks, and dance to please the girls. Then we eat up everything and come away as soon as we can,” replied Tommy, who had evidently seen something of society.

At another time the children were all gathered in a room, when they made a decree that every one that entered should tell a story. Mrs. Jo had just been trapped, and made to pay her forfeit, when little five-year old Robby came in, having got out of bed to see what was the matter, and dragged his bed cover with him. He was about to be turned ignominiously out, as one who could not pay the forfeit, when he protested vigorously against this sentence without a trial, and declared that he could tell “lots of ones” when he had “finked.” Having deeply cogitated for a moment,” [sic] perched on his mother’s knee and wrapped in the gay coverlet, he told the following brief but tragic tale, with an earnestness that made it very funny:

“Once a lady had a million children, and one nice little boy.” [Remainder of 5 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

We expect to see this book even more popular than its predecessor, and shall heartily rejoice at the success of an author whose works afford so much hearty and innocent enjoyment to the family circle, and teach such pleasant and wholesome lessons to old and young.

[Doran, John]. The Athenaeum no. 2278 (24 June 1871): 782.

‘Little Men’ may be called a novel for boys, or rather for boys and girls. As in the com-
results of the practice from stories like ‘Little Men,’ because all there is imaginary. The daily association of such pupils is, we think, undesirable, and could not work for good, although the bringing them together annually in an examination might have its useful results. But the author of this little romance does not pretend to prove anything. She simply takes an idea, and out of it she works a story. In this she has left little untold that was likely to occur in a boarding-school of the kind imagined. The duties, domestic life, manners, games, humours, sacrifices, and jealousies probable in such an establishment are fully illustrated. There is, perhaps, a little too much of it, but the book is for younger readers, and we know how insatiable their appetite is for incidents. A philosophic reader of this little romance will smile at some things, shake his head at others, and as he closes the book he will have a pretty clear idea of what would be the fate of any school established on the principles which governed that at romantic Plumfield.


This is the best of all this lady’s books. There is but one fault to be found with it, and to find that exposes the reviewer to the imputation of hyper-criticism; it is that Aunt Jo and Mr. Bhaer are almost too good for human nature’s daily food. It is hard to believe there exists such superhuman excellence in this fallen world of ours. It is difficult to write a criticism of Jefferson’s [Irving’s] Rip Van Winkle, and of Miss Alcott’s works. Chastity and simplicity of language, and purity and tenderness of thought, are the characteristics of each masterpiece of art and literature. Even thus early in her brief history as a country and a nation, America can boast a long list of classics – Prescott, Irving, Hawthorne, Longfellow – and Time, the great sculptor will one day carve Miss Alcott’s name among them. She paints everything with such a light, loving, womanly touch, that one yearns towards it, whether it be animate or inanimate. Read: “The old tree saw and heard a good many little scenes and confidences that summer, because it became the favorite resort of all the children, and the willow seemed to enjoy it, for a pleasant welcome always met them, and the quiet hours spent in its arms did them all good. [2 sentences omitted.]”

This beautiful cabinet pen-picture should hang beside “The Talking Oak.” Ah! Miss Alcott, sweet Miss Alcott! Like the little men and little women, we too love you, and bless you for humanity’s sake.


It seemed as if no other book could ever delight both old and young as “Little Women” delighted them. The freshness, the novelty, the surprise of that style of writing could never be repeated, and however excellent Miss Alcott’s future books might be, they never could interest and touch her readers as that first simple story did; that was something done once for all. But she has shown that we were mistaken; in “Little Men” there is the same charm, the same magic, the same simplicity, and greater power. The first chapter
is lovely as a story, admirable as a theory of education, and incomparable as a sermon on pure Christianity. Through it we are introduced to the Plumfield school, the “odd place,” “made for all sorts of boys to have a good time in, and to learn how to help themselves, and be useful men”; the school where self-knowledge, self-help and self-control were carefully taught, as well as Latin and mathematics, and where a dozen boys, good and bad, stupid and bright, large and small, gentlemen and vagabonds, “lived happily together, studying and playing, working and squabbling, fighting faults and cultivating virtues in the good old-fashioned way.” Here Professor Bhaer and Mrs. Jo, who grows more charming every year of her life, though she still talks slang and declines to be dignified, rule their noisy household with patient and tender love. The book is a story of the frolics, the mishaps, the struggles and the successes of these boys, but into the story are skilfully woven theories of education and suggestions on many other subjects of popular interest. Love was omnipotent in the school; it inspired the frolics, excited ambition, crushed meanness and selfishness, made virtues bloom, strengthened honor and taught fraternity as it has been taught nowhere else. Yet the boys were not sentimental, and Professor Bhaer was very far from being a prig. He was a grand man, and the boys were healthy, noisy, naughty enough, and belonging unmistakably to this world. Some of the peculiar modes of punishment used at Plumfield were really successfully tried, we think, in Mr. Alcott’s school, which was so famous a quarter of a century or more ago, about which there are many delightful reminiscences; and the incidents that seem most incredible may have happened to members of Miss Alcott’s own family, for that family counts among its members men and women whose unselfish lives and noble works surpass all fiction, and to such men and women come wonderful experiences and strange glimpses into human hearts. The story of the lost children, that of Damon and Pythias and the sketch of John Brooke are the best things in this very good book, – but there is variety sufficient for all tastes; and there cannot be a boy or girl anywhere whom this story would not make better, braver, tenderer, more useful and more loving.


A successful book is a phenomenon of interest to most of us; and Miss Alcott’s Little Men, whatever other claim upon our attention it may or may not have, is a work to be placed upon the list of the successful, from the mercantile, if not from the critical point of view. When “Little Women” appeared, we remarked that we should not be satisfied till we had the story of Beth’s [Jo’s] boys. Our wish is gratified. Like the same author’s book about “Little Women,” the present volume has much of the spirit of childhood between its covers. In these times of high-spiced fiction, when even the “milk for babes” is brandied, so to speak, with the stimulants of impossible adventures and untrue situations, it is pleasant to meet works that are so realistic as Miss Alcott’s. The present story cannot, of course, impress us with the sense of novelty, as to theme and treatment, that attended the earlier book. It will not fail, however, to interest the young as a well-told story; while many older readers, who cherish the belief that child-days are the best days, will find that this little book helps them, as the spring-tide note of
the cuckoo helped Wordsworth, to “renew that golden time again.” Without ascribing high literary merit to this story, we still find a freshness and daring about its style which will commend it to many readers.

In addition to these more obvious causes of Miss Alcott’s popularity is one which has not, we think, been noticed, but which helps to explain the quick attainment of more than one recent literary reputation besides her own. It is not denied that in the American mind there is a growing taste for unconventional expression — for sentiments, characters, situations that approach, or that boldly overstep, for at least a little distance, the hazardous limits of the proprieties. Nor is this sentiment confined, by any means, to the friends of sensational writing. It is also the experience of a majority of cultivated readers. So much cant — in spite of Mr. Carlyle — is still current in the world, so much mere formula clings to our life and speech, that we welcome the literature of reaction, and often care little whether this reaction may not go too far. We enjoy seeing a bold onslaught against the Philistines, provided the sally is made by a person in good standing, whether literary or religious; and we are delighted with the liberties which we do not venture to imitate. Safe within the pale of propriety, we delight in seeing others commit a trespass upon guarded ground. It is only essential that the trespass be committed by one of our own ilk, and boldly carried off with an unconscious air. A smack of the irreverent has an irresistible charm for those who let “I dare not” wait upon “I would.” Thus Mr. Beecher’s pulpit freedoms are to be credited largely with his renown. Bret Harte introduces to us people who have excellent qualities; but whose ruffianly behavior and language, noted behind the safe barrier of the printed page, inspires the primmest spirit of propriety with a dreadful delight. However properly we behave, most of us have a secret yearning for the improper; and when the writer or speaker appears who can adroitly defy the conventional and yet keep the peace with order-loving people, he is hailed with acclamations. To take trivial instances. Miss Alcott breaks forth with the exclamation, “Ye gods and little fishes!” and the authoress of “The Gates Ajar” boldly catalogues, with an upholsterer’s imagination, the furniture of Heaven. The demure person whose speech is content with “Yea, yea, and nay, nay,” or who would be scandalized at the thought of attempting such liberties of speech or of speculation, yet experiences a secret thrill of delight at these boldnesses on the part of his favorite authors. To be a little heretical by proxy, while they remain personally irreproachable and in good company — orthodox society — this is a delightful titillation to conventional or timid readers, and shall we grudge them their gratification? If the reaction against formalism carries them a trifle too far over the line of propriety, the writers who minister to their weakness are not to be blamed for the error. We must confess that it is far more frequent for readers to create the writer than for the author to create his readers, the taste by which he is to be enjoyed.

We will not, however, insist upon the charge of irreverence against Miss Alcott’s writings: for, in the first place, it would not be easy to maintain such a charge against the readers whom it attains with timidity; and, secondly, if it were tenable, we should only commit the mistake which Hoppner made when he attacked with a sarcasm his great rival in portraiture, Sir Thomas Lawrence. “The ladies of Lawrence,” said this champion of decorum in art, “show a gaudy dissoluteness of taste, and sometimes trespass on moral as well as on professional virtue.” The sarcasm had the opposite effect to what Hoppner intended. Almost from the moment of its utterance, his fashionable patrons began to desert
him, and to crowd to the easel of the artist whose indecorum he had denounced. Secure in themselves, they took a timorous delight in the imputation of naughtiness to their limner. The imputation was unjust; but it was the best advertisement that Lawrence could have had. We shall not, therefore, abet the success of Miss Alcott’s book by declaring that its ejaculations are too lively, and that it manifests any lack of that sobriety of tone which is supposed to be essential in reading for well-regulated families.


It is a queer thing, but it is no less true, that twenty-six thousand copies of Little Men were sold before the book was published. The publishers may have “sold short,” and gone beyond the strict limit of gospel doctrine, but we shall not pretend to say, whatever we may think, that they transcended the Psalms, the canticles of Solomon, or the sermon on the mount. “Let every man,” says Paul, “be persuaded in his own mind.” If the announcement that “Little Men,” was soon to be issued, sent a thrill of joy through hundreds, it may be thousands, of small hearts, we do not intend to cavil on points of teaching. The youthful faith, in every particular an honest faith, accepts doctrines without sharp criticism; and we shall not find fault with the fact that the publishers of “Little Men” have taken orders which they could not immediately fill. Those for whom Miss Alcott writes will care for nothing beyond her books. “Little Women” or “Little Men” may be the titles of her stories, they will all equally engage the attention and interest of the young reader. We commend this last publication of Miss Alcott for its truth to nature, for its excellent moral and for its entertaining pages, which, at the same time, amuse the imagination and impart to the mind a wholesome lesson.

Old and New 4.1 (July 1871): 102.

Zion’s Herald 48.28 (13 July 1871): 329:2.

A most lovable and charming book.

Little Men, by Miss Alcott, follows “Little Women” in its run round the world. It is animated in the extreme. The boys act as they please, and yet grow good by such permission. The school is wonderfully easy and jolly, but for intellectual results is about as barren as the opposite extreme which Mr. Squeers so successfully run. Everything goes by extremes. We remember a man who flogged his children severely, and then fed them with candy to stop their crying. This is the law of society. From Dotheboys Hall to Plumfield; from treacle to beefsteak, fried potatoes, and hot cakes and coffee; from Mrs. Squeers to “Pa Baher [Bhaer] and Aunt Jo.” Here the boys throw pillows in their night-gowns, for fifteen minutes Saturday night, and spend all Sunday afternoons in hunting eggs, visiting the pigs, dogs, and chickens, called the “menagerie,” and have not a word on Christ, religion, the Bible, or anything holy and bracing. But Miss Alcott is good-humored, loves boys,
can’t see anything bad in anybody. “Nan,” who is a perfect witch, is only exuberant. The boys that help themselves without asking, are only very mischievous and funny. What would New England have been under such preaching? Miss Warner’s admirable Vinegar Hill stories, illustrative of the tenacity of human depravity, and the only cure, are a million fold better, and will have infinitely better effects; for whom they cure they cure, while this cures nobody. It is a Sunday-school book for Weiss’ religion, Be as good as you can, and be jolly anyhow.


It can hardly be asserted that Little Men by Miss Alcott (Roberts Brothers), is a natural story, or doubted that it is an entertaining one. The description of an actual boarding-school, with its humdrum life, would be as tedious as any thing that can well be conceived of, and that Miss Alcott is able to invest a story of boarding-school life with any interest must be taken as one of the evidences of her genius. There is hardly enough in the story itself to sustain the reader’s interest in it; and despite the author’s bright style and vivid descriptions, and, best of all, her hearty sympathy with youth, the book drags a little if one attempts to read it directly through. It is more entertaining read as a series of sketches than as a single connected story. We beg leave to doubt whether, on the whole, it would be for the best interest of any well-ordered school for the boys to have unlimited liberty to slide down the balusters at the risk of broken heads, and every Saturday night, after their bath, to chase each other over the house in a sham battle with the pillows. We are inclined to think that Mr. Bhaer’s original method of compelling the guilty boy to inflict the feruling on the teacher would lose its moral effect if it were generally adopted. We protest that for a boy to bring a lying accusation against himself to shield a friend is a very mistaken kind of heroism. Had we been present, we should have been tempted to admonish Mother Bhaer that it was not a safe operation to let her baby suck the spoon in which she had just administered a dose of medicine to a ragged urchin just picked up from the street, the nature of whose disease she did not know. But, after all, the lesson which these improbable incidents are meant to teach, and do teach, is a good one – this, namely, that personal sympathy with children, in all their life, even their pranks and good-natured mischief, is the first condition of acquiring influence over them, and hence is the first condition of any true and good government in school or family. The children will be sure to read “Little Men” with interest, and the parents can read it with profit.

Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine 83.494 (August 1871): 186.

Our readers have not forgotten “Little Women,” nor the warm-hearted, clever, ugly Joe. She is established in our affections, and Miss Alcott has done well to make her the presiding genius of her new volume. Joe and her husband keep a boys’ school, into which, however, some girls are
admitted; and the history of a few months’ school life is told so pleasantly and brightly that the end comes too soon. Miss Alcott has such a gift for story-telling that she should never write anything but such books as “Little Men.” She bids fair to become as decidedly the children’s author as Miss Edgeworth was years ago. In our “Table” for next month we shall speak of this book at greater length.

The fame of “Little Women” carried “Little Men” into a wonderful circulation as soon as it was issued; its own interest will keep it long before the public. It is brimful of the qualities which made the former volume so successful. Her boys and girls are fresh, hearty, and natural, and the author fulfills the condition we laid down above [that a “very excellent test of a story-writer for children is how his stories are appreciated by adults”], for her book may be read alike by parent and child.

Whoever wishes to enjoy a vivid sensation can do so by ordering a copy of Louisa M. Alcott’s new book, Little Men (Roberts Bros., Boston), and opening the package in presence of children who have read Little Women, but do not yet know “Jo’s boys.” We enjoyed this sensation last week. We shall not forget it. The three little girls who gathered around our chair seemed multiplied into dozens by their darting and climbing and crowding to get a glimpse of the pages; the three little voices, usually the gentlest and sweetest little voices in the world, rose into a Babel of clamor.

“Oh, let me have the first reading!”
“No! I spoke first.”
“Oh, that’s too mean. You had first reading of Little Women!” and the book bade fair to be an apple of discord.

“Nobody is to have the first reading. Nobody can read all the time. You must take turns;” decided the wise mamma, impartial referee in all troublesome questions. And “turns” it was! From 6 a.m. till inexorable bedtime, not an hour in which some child might not be found curled up in some corner of that house, so buried in that book that she could only be roused sufficiently to ejaculate, “Oh, it’s perfectly splendid!”

“I wish Miss Alcott would write a new book every week,” said one.

“Why don’t she?” said another; “I’m sure she could. I’ve read Little Women all through, eleven times, and this is nicer than that.”

So it is. Charming as was Little Women, Little Men is in many ways better. Artistically, it is done with a more even hand; morally, it has a distincter and surer aim. It is not possible for any earnest and loving mother of boys to read the story of Jo’s family without having her work made easier for the rest of her life. It is one of the best of the many good points in Miss Alcott’s writing, this teaching fathers and mothers by winning the children first. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings she perfects her lessons, and so subtly that nobody suspects he is being instructed. Didactic would be the last adjective ever applied to her stories. People often resent
even the word “instructive,” used in description of them. It is better so. The beautiful healing will sink deeper for being undetected. If the titles had read “Little Women; or, How to Make Home Happy,” and “Little Men; or, How to Bring up Boys,” the pride of the Natural Man and the Natural Woman would have taken fire instantly, and have rejected the gratuitous advice. But no one who loves and comprehends children, and (therefore) grieves over the sad failure of the average parent, the average home, can read these stories carefully without seeing that they are brimful of cure for the common evils and mistakes in family management.

Another notable charm in Miss Alcott’s stories is their absolute fidelity to real life. She is entitled to greater praise as an artist than has been bestowed upon her; ultimately she will be recognized as the very best painter, en genre, of the American domestic life in the middle classes; the very faithfulness, the aliveness – there ought to be that word – of her pictures prevents their having full justice done them at once; also the fact that, thus far, they are only simple “studies,” and of very narrow range. It is so with Teniers’s and Gerard Dow’s pictures. One can look at them for weeks and enjoy them, without fully finding out how true they are. But go to the Pinacothek on a festa day, when the peasants are allowed to go in, and you start with surprise! You think they have stepped out of the very frames on the walls!

That Miss Alcott has sufficient artistic power to succeed in a longer story, with more variety, incident, and machinery, it would not be safe to infer: she certainly had not when she wrote Moods. But between that and her later works is an almost immeasurable advance: we say immeasurable, because it seems a positive change in kind as well as in quality of work. However, while she will give us simple stories which all boys and girls read with delight and profit, and all fathers and mothers laugh and cry over after their boys and girls have gone to bed, we may well be content, without desiring that she should attempt that almost impossible thing, the American Novel.

Arthur’s Lady’s Home Magazine 38.3 (September 1871): 182–83.

No one who read “Moods,” one of Miss Alcott’s earlier works, would have dreamed its author capable of books such as she has since produced. That was morbid in tone and pernicious in sentiment. But in “Little Women,” and the works that followed after it, she has shown herself capable of something far better. She has, indeed, proved herself par excellence the delineator of American home life, and especially of American children. The simple domestic stories have caused a sensation such as few novels have produced, and have won admiration from all because of their simplicity and truthfulness.

Scribner’s Monthly for August says of “Little Men:” “It is not possible for any earnest and loving mother of boys . . . [remainder of paragraph omitted].”

Eclectic Magazine n.s. 14.3 (September 1871): 375–76.

It is related of Miss Alcott, that when her first work was written and she had
concluded to make a venture with the public, the publisher to whom she offered the manuscript advised her to “stick to school-teaching,” for she was certain to make a failure in literature. It would seem like *ex post facto* wisdom to ridicule this publisher now, and it would hardly be fair to make his blunder the text for disparaging comments upon the judgment and discrimination of publishers in general, for Miss Alcott is precisely the kind of writer whom the average publisher suspects in the premises. If she had written an ordinary and orthodox book, in the ordinary and orthodox way, said publisher would probably have been quite ready to add her name to his list of bookmakers; but Miss Alcott has displayed marked and decided individuality from the start, and the publisher, if he understands the matter at all, knows very well that genius itself is not more capricious than the kind of reception which the public is likely to extend to an author who departs from the established type.

This mitigates the error of the publisher, but we should hardly say that it excuses him, for it would seem impossible for the dullest to read a specimen of Miss Alcott’s work without seeing that not only did she have something to say, and that her way of saying it was fresh and vivid, but that she had in her all the elements of popularity. Such, at least, was the prompt and emphatic verdict of the public, for no sooner did “Little Women” – the first of her books fairly brought before readers – make its appearance, than it took the whole reading world, old and young, by storm; and from that time to the present, though its circle of readers has steadily widened, we have never seen or heard a criticism on it that was respectable and at the same time disparaging. “Little Women” is indeed almost perfect in its way, and the great success which it has achieved is not only a triumph of good literature over bad, but signal for the little ones who find their ideals and companions in it instead of in the absurdly dull, priggish, and preposterous books usually provided for them. There is little doubt in our mind that it has been as productive of good as it has of amusement.

“Little Men” has been rather more criticized than “Little Women,” and the objections are usually well taken, for Miss Alcott undoubtedly understands girls better than she does boys, and her conception of the latter is about as true to life as those mysterious abstractions which female novelists are fond of substituting in their books for men. It is not one whit less interesting, however, and it will probably satisfy the majority of readers to know that it introduces us once more to our old friends of “Little Women.” Part second of that work left us at the end with Meg settled calmly down to her duties as mother of a family, Amy married to Laurie, and Jo married to Professor Bhaer, but still revolving in her mind original schemes of usefulness. “Little Men” brings us again into familiar relations with all these, and takes us besides into the school at Plumfield, where “Jo’s boys” number about a dozen. What jolly experiences we go through with those boys it would be impossible even to hint, but the memory of them is pleasant and most vivid. We never meet exactly such boys, it is true, in real life, but one is better for having met them if only in a book; and doubtless many a reader is already looking forward eagerly to that other volume which must take the “little men” away from Plumfield, and into the larger relations which lie before even the smallest and most thoughtless of men.

Miss Alcott is, to our mind, the most wholesome and healthy-natured storyteller that New England has produced. She is not one of the
“Folks with a mission,
Whose gaunt eyes, see
Golden ages rising,"

but who see nothing in the present but “a tangled skein of will and fate” which each one’s pen is to unravel. We do not know what her philosophy of life is, or even if she has any; but we are quite certain of one thing, and that is that we should not envy the one who should take upon himself the task of convincing her of the total depravity of human nature, or that the world is utterly “out of joint.” In addition to this, Miss Alcott possesses the prime faculty of a story-teller: that, namely, of inspiring interest. There is not a dull or commonplace chapter in her books; and one can pick them up anywhere and open at any page, and it will not take three minutes to inspire him with the desire to “read on.”

If there is any household, or Sunday-school library, or collection of books intended for children, which is yet without these volumes, the duty of the head of such household or keeper of such library seems to us quite clear.

_Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine_ 83.495
(September 1871):
279–80.

Still more [indebted] will be Miss Alcott’s readers. There could not be a stronger contrast to a book of science than her new story. Like the others, it is about boys and the way to teach them: but the things which she wants to teach them are gentleness, truthfulness, perseverance, and the kindred virtues. Every boy and girl who has read “Little Women” will be eager for “Little Men.” One of the little women – Joe, who married Professor Bhaer – helps her husband to take care of a dozen boys, among whom, to soften and refine them, are admitted two or three little girls. The story of their school life for six months – not every day of it, but especial days here and there – is told so simply, so naturally, and so brightly that the children have to share the book with their parents. It is wonderful with what power Miss Alcott keeps the characters of her many boys so entirely distinct, and so clear in our memories that each new exploit is seen to belong to the actor only.

This same power of intense realization and portraiture, exercised in a broader sphere, makes a great novelist, a George Eliot or a Charlotte Bronté. But Miss Alcott has chosen to write for children, and she has her reward in a boundless popularity. In this book she has added a new gallery of portraits to the little figures that live in our memory. Demi and Daisy, over whom she lingers with such loving care; the mischievous Tommy and hoyden Nan; Nat, the musician, and, most firmly-colored of all, Dan, strong, bold, and hard, but reclaimed to goodness by the kindness and confidence of his mistress. Joe the matron is what we all expect from Joe the girl – wise and loving, but full of odd ways and unexpected feelings, and with a native liking for strength, and purpose, and manly capacity. Laurie is her fast ally, helping her in her good work, descending from his home in the city every now and then to play the good fairy at “Plumfield.” We have only one fault to find with the book. We think Miss Alcott, in her wish to be natural, makes her children talk so that a careful mother would be sorry to hear them. Of course, a great deal of slang is current among the little people as well as their parents; but why
should it be exaggerated and intensified, as if no child could be taught to speak good English without becoming unnatural? Why should every one say ain’t instead of isn’t? This and some other tricks of speech give a faux air of vulgarity to Miss Alcott’s books, which seems to us very unnecessary. We know a good many boys, as lively, hearty, and manly as need be, without a spark of priggishness about them, who would no more say ain’t than them things, simply because they never heard such a word in their homes, and were corrected when they picked it up from their companions.

But, when this trifling deduction is made, we have only thanks to render to Miss Alcott, on behalf of parents and children alike, for a book so wholesome, pure, and good; natural, easy, and interesting; showing us children as they are, and the way to win them to truth and right.

The Ladies’ Repository
[Boston] 46.[3]
(September 1871):
233–34.

It seems to us that Miss Alcott has not done as well with her “Little Men” as with her “Little Women.” The Plumfield of the later story is quite a different place from that where Jo and Amy went for a quiet and perhaps homesick visit in their own early days. And the unlikeness is something more than a change of time and incident; it is a change of persons. The Jo of “Little Women” could not have grown up into this Jo if she had tried, which we don’t believe she ever did. The fact is, the first story is real and the second made; and the unmistakable charm of being told straight out of real life, which was the spirit and soul of the earlier work, is wanting in this. The incidents and scenes from real life, as no doubt many of them are, give something of the old flavor and piquancy, but as a connected story it bears the marks of manufacture. The individuality of the boys is not so distinct as that of her former characters, with more apparent effort to make them so. They never walked into the story, but were put there and are made to live and move and have their being simply to fill out the picture.

Or perhaps it is our jealousy at seeing our old favorite thrust into the background that makes the story appear so to us. What we want to hear about is Jo, her thoughts and feelings, her professor and her Laurie. But her life has suddenly grown common-place; she is a “thin old woman,” with no aim in existence save to dandle Teddy and be overrun by a crowd of noisy and not always mannerly boys. Is it well to inculcate this lesson, quite so strongly as we are all doing; that this world was created chiefly for each generation of little folks, and that older ones have no rights which they are bound to respect? It is, to be sure, not the story of Jo but of Jo’s boys, but we wish it might have been told so that Jo should not have seemed sunk in proportion as they were exalted.

We must say also, since we are in a fault-finding mood, that we cannot regard the Plumfield School as a model of all that is wise and excellent. The general drift of its doctrines is good, both for reproof and exhortation, but there is always such a thing possible as the opposite extreme. A little less slang and noise and free-and-easiness generally would be more agreeable to us even at Plumfield.

But with all this, the book is of course among the better class of juveniles. Bright,
racy, and with much genuine common-sense and sympathy with boy life, it will be read by all the young folks with an interest only second to that with which they pored over “Little Women” and the “Old Fashioned Girl.” The fact that Miss Alcott did her best first does not prevent her doing fairly well every time.

Miss Alcott says, the unprejudiced criticism of children is not to be despised, and she has need to be gratified with the lavish praise offered her by her many youthful admirers. Though their flattering comments be not always couched in the most elegant phraseology, and a superabundance of adjectives – among which “awful nice” gains force by constant repetition – seems necessary to relieve their delighted hearts, yet are they none the less sincere and acceptable. Perhaps no book of the season has been so eagerly sought after as this, or has given such genuine satisfaction, which is saying a great deal, for *Little Women* raised expectations that we feared would not be realized. We are agreeably disappointed. We welcome *Little Men* heartily, and find them thoroughly enjoyable. Though “little men,” they are full-grown, rollicking, hearty boys. Boys in the rough, but as such easily understood and appreciated by their many prototypes; boys to be admired for their frank good-heartedness, and boys to be envied for the “splendid times” they have. To less favored ones, what a haven of bliss does “Plumfield” appear, when they contemplate the “gorgeousness” of those “pillow-fights;” unrestricted flinging of pillows – of pillows with covers that would not tear! How the old-time glory pales in their light! How insignificant those engagements, where the final round and final *twist* invariably rent the dainty pillow-case asunder! No wonder even “Dan” was softened and subdued in an atmosphere where love held license in subjection, for what more convincing proof need we of the wonderful discipline of “Plumfield” than that the boys laid down their “arms” (or pillows) when the bell announced the “engagement” was over? “And nothing but an occasional giggle or a suppressed whisper broke the quiet which followed the Saturday-night frolic.” Chief among the many pleasant things in this pleasant book, is the thorough insight displayed in the portrayal of children’s characters, and the tender sympathy shown toward them. As we read of “Demi,” “Nat,” “Jack,” “Ned,” and the rest of “Jo’s” boys, we take them to our hearts, and feel they are real, living children. And one who has ever been with, or known any thing of little folks, can not fail to be charmed with the naturalness of the scenes described. The “sackerrifice” of the “Naughty Kitty-Mouse” is a capital bit of fun, and a truthful illustration of the wonderful power of imagination in children.

The “Naughty Kitty-Mouse” is a terrible sprite, whose will is law, and whom “Demi” faithfully serves and “Daisy” fears; so that when “Demi,” coming from school, solemnly whispers to “Daisy” that the “Kitty-Mouse” wants them, she, knowing there is no help for them, anxiously inquires, “What for?” With great gravity, “Demi” replies “For a sackerrifice.” There is to be a fire behind the big rock at two o’clock, and we are to bring the things we like best and burn them,” with an awful emphasis on the last words. Poor little “Daisy” is terror-stricken,
but the thought of denying the unseen tyrant any thing never occurring to her, she sorrowfully collects her treasures, and follows her brother. The sacrificial train sets forth, “Teddy” and others joining them – the whole having been suggested by “Uncle Fritz’s” description of the customs of the Greeks. They reach the rock, a fire is kindled on a flat stone for an altar; they march around three times, and the ceremony begins. “I shall begin,” says “Demi,” “and as fast as my things are burned, you must bring yours.” He solemnly lays a little picture-book on the flaming altar, then a boat, and, finally, one by one, a regiment of leaden soldiers. Not one faltered or hung back; from the splendid red and yellow captain to the small drummer, who had lost his legs, all vanished in the flames, and mingled in one common pool of melted lead. Then “Daisy’s” turn comes; her little heart is rent in twain. “My dear dollies, how can I let you go?” she moans, hugging a promiscuous lot to her bosom; but the High Priest is inexorable. “You must,” he says, and with a farewell kiss to each, she lays them upon the coals. “More, more,” growls the “Kitty-Mouse,” and a whole village is consumed, each successive offering adding excitement to the scene. The wildest sacrifices are made, until Annabella also falls a victim, and being kid, her death agonies are of the most startling character, which so terrify “Teddy,” that he flies from the scene, refusing to be comforted. “Mrs. Bhaer” comes to the rescue, and after enjoying the fun, and laughing heartily at the solemn faces of the children, gives them some very sensible advice. There is genuine humor in this, as also in “Daisy’s” Ball, where the boys are invited and bribed to good behavior by the promise of “nice things to eat,” and where, after having eaten the good things, they so deport themselves as to leave their entertainers in tears; but they make up finally, and all goes well.

All things considered, “Aunt Jo” has a hard time of it; but she is happy, doing good, and we have no right to complain; our old friends have all turned out well. “Laurie,” whom we all wanted “Jo” to marry, and she would not, is still her faithful friend and admirer, and “believes” in the “Plumfield” system; for the boys, though they learned less from books than boys at other schools, learned more of that wisdom which makes sterling men.

“The success of Miss Alcott’s books – of which more than 130,000 volumes have been sold – is a merited tribute to a writer who peculiarly represents the cordial simplicity, the pure kindliness, the sunny wisdom of those charming nooks of cultured common life which are so marked, and so delightful a feature of New England. One needs to have seen the Concord hill-side on which these vines which have crept so far and so gracefully were grown, and the brave simplicity and tenderness and beauty of the Alcott household, to understand how naturally Little Women, and Little Men (just published), have sprung from Miss Alcott’s genius. It is but a few steps from the vineyard where the first Concord grapes were grown, and almost next door to the home of Hawthorne – a spot which looks out to the sun as much as any to be found on this planet of shadows, and consecrated now for many and many a year by as much sweetness and light as was ever found in a rural cottage. The elder Alcotts, father and mother, have had a full share of the new experiments of a new time, not without much of the suffering incident thereto, and have seen
in their day much of the best fruit of the ripest culture of New England. The venerable sage, whose reverend hairs are familiar to so many, has been the Gentle Shepherd of the new Israel of radicalism, a master whom Emerson even has regarded as the patriarch of transcendentalism; while of the patient Alcott mother, who has waged the weary war of hard labor against the countless difficulties of a prophet’s struggle with the world and always found a bright side, and kept a heart of good cheer, it seems to us fit to say this, that such motherhood, with or without woman-movement enthusiasm, is more to the purpose of the world’s good than the entire sum of platform demonstrations made within this generation. The gods are to be congratulated upon the success of the Alcott experiment, as well as all childhood, young and old, upon the singular charm of the little men and little women who have run forth from the Alcott cottage, children of a maiden whose genius is beautiful motherhood. “A million readers delighted and instructed!” That is to some purpose. The new book, *Little Men*, is so exactly in the vein of its predecessor, and indeed reproduces, with new interest, so much of the interest of *Little Women*, that we may content ourselves with advising everybody, young or old, to read it.

We are glad to announce the appearance of *Little Men*, the new story of Louisa Alcott. As our readers have doubtless conjectured, it gives more of “Jo’s” experiences; and of course she is the same spirited, practical, capable, hearty woman whose character so won our hearts in “Little Women.” The other old familiar names only occasionally appear. The book is mainly taken up with the doings of Mr. and Mrs. Bhaer’s [Bhaer’s] school-boys. In the last pages of *Little Women* it will be remembered that a glimpse was given of the house and property that Jo and her husband were going to transform into a school, founded on true principles, which should develop body and mind and soul alike in harmonious proportion. In this new story we are shown the workings of this wonderful institution. We are sorry to say that we never heard of such a school before. We are sure all the boys who read this book, and we hope many will, will wish they could go to just such another. Will not the author kindly tell us whether there ever really was such a thing or whether it is all just make-believe? The strongest reason we have for thinking that it is located in Spain is that persons in our own land would not support such an institution. Why! the boys are allowed to slide down the banisters and to have pillow-fights! and sometimes they even dared to shy a pillow at their teacher – if it had been a rock, now, that might have been excused; but a pillow! what becomes of a teacher’s dignity under a pillow? But at Plumfield, where Jo kept the school, every manifestation of youthful spirits was not checked unless it were harmful, and then a wise turning of the course of the overflow directed the superfluous energy into useful and innocent channels, and made it a source of delight to all. There is plenty of fun and no little mischief recounted in this book. The twelve little men, Jo’s pupils, whose portraits are given in the frontispiece, are full of pranks, merry and otherwise; and their doings are recorded with a gusto that everyone who remembers his own childhood will sympathize

“Miss Alcott’s New Book.” [Courier Journal {Louisville}?] ([1871?]). Clippings File.
with. They are by no means saints, nei-
ther are they prigs, but just boys, and
their recorded conversations are artless
and natural. There is a deep lesson in this
book that will make its perusal by teachers
and parents, also, profitable, if its teach-
ings are heeded. Perhaps the author an-
ticipated that older heads than children’s
might shake with laughter, or drop the tear
of sympathy over its pages; at any rate we
cordially recommend it to their attention,
for we believe Miss Alcott has presented
the right theory of true education here,
even if we do not always agree with her in
the manner of its practical application. It
is published in a neat volume, by Roberts
Brothers, in style uniform with Miss Al-
cott’s other books, with several full-page
illustrations, and may be obtained from
John P. Morton & Co.

[Pacific California?] ([1871?]). Clippings File.

“Little Men” is the sequel to “Little
Women,” by the same hand, so success-
ful in drawing pictures of simple home-
life. This book more resembles the first
part of “Little Women” than the second.
It depicts the successful carrying out of
the “visionary” plan, hinted at in the for-
mer volume, for a “queer school,” where
lost boys might find a home. All who have
read “Little Women”—and who has not?—
will welcome this addition to the number
of fresh and healthful stories. Miss Alcott
writes in such a pleasing style, with such
an excellent moral tone, so free from mor-
bidness or sensational excitement, that it
is a pleasure to recommend her books.
We hope they may have some influence to
improve the current taste in this class of
literature.

[British periodical] ([1871?]). Clippings File.

This is really a most charming book, on
a subject of the first importance. We have
many very excellent works on the training
of children, but, unfortunately, very few
that come down to the level of the masses.
Here, however, the subject is ably put in
the form of a narrative that cannot fail to
become popular. And surely, while we see
around us so many badly trained children,
and so many of those having the care of
them holding such erroneous ideas—or,
in many cases, no ideas at all—as to how
their duty should be discharged, we must
hail with lively satisfaction the appearance
of this book.

The “little men” are the pupils at Plum-
field, a school kept by Mr Bhaer and
his wife—Uncle Fritz and Aunt Jo—as their little friends lovingly call them.
The scholars are few, but these few form
a somewhat heterogeneous mixture. We
have boys whose parents are well-to-do
along with the two heroes of the story—
Nat, who used to go “fiddling round the
streets,” and Dan, “the boy that sold the
papers”—“a regular bad lot,” as he de-
scribed himself. This will perhaps shock
English ideas of what a select board-
school ought to be, but fortunately Plum-
field is in America, where, of course, “one
man is as good as another.” Nat is sent
to the Bhaers by an old friend of theirs,
Uncle Laurie; and, after remaining some
time at Plumfield, they are induced by Nat
to receive Dan. The latter, when he first
makes his appearance, is decidedly “a bad
lot;” and, perhaps, the most interesting
part of the book is the account of the way
Uncle Fritz and Aunt Jo went to work
to drive out of him the spirit of mischief
and disorder, and fill him with a love of
honour and honesty. Kindness and sympathy are the means whereby the boys are ruled at Plumfield. They love and respect their teachers, and fear to give them pain by doing wrong. The lads are put upon their honour, they feel this, and act accordingly. Their peculiar likings are carefully observed by their kind guardians, and suitably encouraged and directed. Every care is taken to make Plumfield a happy home. In summer the lessons are short, the holidays long; all sorts of outdoor work and amusements are devised, and they become such a “rosy, hearty, sunburnt set of boys” as one could desire to see.

Aunt Jo takes it into her head that it would improve the tone of the boys if she had some girls among them; and accordingly this new element is introduced at Plumfield. After giving it a fair trial, she has the satisfaction of proving to Uncle Laurie that her plan has not been a failure, as he predicted it would be. She says:

Really the effect of these girls has been excellent. [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

We may mention that the author is decidedly in favour of allowing women to participate equally with men in higher education, and is especially in favour of allowing them to become doctors.

Mrs. Alcott writes in a graceful, easy and fluent style, has a great love of her subject, and knows thoroughly what she is writing about. The result is that she has produced a book that will be pleasant reading to old and young, while to parents, and others having the care of children, it will be of great value. The children’s amusements are capitally described, and their talk is thoroughly natural and in keeping with their different characters.

Miss Alcott, it is feared, will write a companion-work to her “Little Women,” entitled “Little Men.” Some evil minded persons are already urging her thereto. Our Lilliputia swarms with them, and they are little enough for a big book, which Miss Alcott too is abundantly able to produce, judging only by what she has already done. Her friends, however, will grieve to hear that her health has declined so seriously as to unfit her for work, and to compel her to seek other climates for its restoration.

Little Men; or, Life with Jo’s Boys by Louisa M. Alcott, Author of Little Women, to which charming work it is a sequel. Every reader who has little men and women at home ought to buy this book and place it by the side of Robinson Crusoe in the nursery. Louisa M. Alcott’s works are justly celebrated for originality, and none but a parent can fully appreciate the many delicate and beautiful ideas this lady groups together in simple tales for the amusement and improvement of our precious little ones.
Miss Alcott’s literary reputation does not rest mainly in the fact that she made a fortunate hit in “Little Women.” She certainly did this, but she is quite able to produce other books, in even a different vein, which will be acceptable to the public. The present volume is an attempt to carry the tide of popular favor with which “Little Women” was received over the masculine gender. Aside from the unnaturalness of this attempt, there are other reasons why it should fail. Too much of a good thing is never acceptable to the public. “Little Women” sounded well enough, and was quite a hit, but “Little Men,” following so rapidly, suggests a surfeit of the thing.

The book, however, is quite readable, as every thing Miss Alcott writes is, though if it had been called “Shucks,” or almost anything else, we would have liked the book all the better.

*Suggestive, truthful, amusing, and racy, in a certain simplicity of style which very few are capable of producing. It is the history of only six months’ school-life of a dozen boys, but is full of variety and vitality, and the having girls with the boys is a charming novelty, too. To be very candid, this book is so thoroughly good that we hope Miss Alcott will give us another in the same genial vein, for she understands children and their ways.*


*No true-hearted boy or girl can read this book without deriving benefit from the perusal; nor, for that matter, will it least injure children of a larger growth to endeavor to profit by the examples of gentleness and honesty set before them in its pages. What a delightful school “Jo” did keep! Why, it makes us want to live our childhood’s days over again, in the hope that we might induce some kind-hearted female to establish just such a school, and might prevail upon our parents to send us, “because it was cheap.” . . . We wish the genial authoress a long life in which to enjoy the fruits of her labor, and cordially thank her, in the name of our young people, for her efforts in their behalf.*

*Boston Evening Transcript* 57.17,568 (1 August 1884): 4:2. Also reprinted as “Miss Alcott’s Writings,” with attribution and with minor emendations, in *The Literary News* no. 9 (September 1884): 43.

We have, before this, alluded to the fact that Miss Alcott’s writings for young people had been objected to by some reading committees in search of books because they were said to be wanting in a certain necessary religious element. It was said,
for instance, that one of her most popular books did not mention the Deity, from the first page to the last. But actual proof of the effect of her writings is better than the reasoning of critics, and it is therefore pleasant for an author to receive a letter like the following, which we are permitted to print, from a lady school-teacher in a village school in a far distant Western State:

Dear Miss Alcott—I hope you will pardon the liberty taken in addressing you, but you do not seem a stranger to us. This is written by the request of my pupils, who are your sincere admirers. I have been reading your books, “Little Women” and “Little Men,” to them this summer, and they heartily thank you for writing such good, helpful books. They unanimously decide that they are the best books they have ever heard, and they would like to know if there is a sequel published to “Little Men;” because they would like to hear what became of those boys, especially Demi and Dan. I have just a small country school of young pupils, but most of the children are unusually intelligent. I am sure you would have been pleased this summer to see them so interested in good books. At noon they would take their lunch baskets and go out under the trees, and I would read to them; and they would come earlier in the morning, or even stay after school, to hear reading. In school they were continually referring to “Aunt Jo.” In their language lessons they often wrote of some incident that occurred, or some character they particularly admired.

We even had a “Conscience Book,” and it did much good.

One of my best pupils is very much like Demi. He is a well-informed little gentleman; and if your time is not too much occupied I wish you would write to him. It would encourage him ever so much, and I am sure he will some time be a friend to be proud of.

Oh, your books have done so much good in this school! The children are better and happier for hearing them; and they have been such a help to me. I think I can understand boys and girls better now. I hope that I may be a true Mother Bhaer to my pupils.

That God may bless you with a long and pleasant life is the wish of your many friends.

Foster, George E. “Little Men.” Reprinted, with attribution, from the *Ithacan* ([1888]).

It was Monday evening. Around the warm stove in an Ithaca parlor was drawn a pleasant family circle. The little lad whose merry prattle helped make glad the household, came from his father’s library, with his favorite book in hand, and clamoring into his mother’s lap asked her to read more about “Little Men.” For over a week the book had been his evening delight. “What a pretty story ‘Little Men’ is,” he would say. “I wish I could be one of those Little Men, too,” he would exclaim. “What a nice lady she must be to write so pretty,” again prattled the lad. Outside the door the newsboy shouted “Journal,” and the father opened its pages still damp from the press. He reads, “Louisa May Alcott, the gifted writer, died this morning.” Dead! but a moment before she had been speaking to the family circle through the printed pages of her book, and yet she died this morning. “Died this morning.” A peculiar silence pervaded the room as the father read these words.
The mother ceased reading, and looked silently at the printed pages. The little lad looked awe-struck for a moment. Indeed, having never seen death, he hardly knew what it meant, but yet he comprehended that something had happened to the good lady who had made in some way that pretty story. His little face, usually all sunshine, clouded for a few moments and then he said, “Mamma, ‘Little Men’ still live, don’t they?” Bless the little lad’s heart, “Little Men” will never die, and through its pages she who wrote will live on and on in the hearts of the people. Louisa Alcott is dead; it was Helen Hunt Jackson who called her “the benefactor of households.” Who doubts the truth of that eulogy? Not one household, but the households of the land weep to-day because their benefactor is gone. Not only her “Little Men” but “Little Women” remain to carry on the work she long since began; but many other volumes of like character have been the offspring of her busy pen. From her works she is said to have received one hundred thousand dollars, but the wealth of treasures she has laid up for her beyond the river, as a result of these healthful works, no one can estimate.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

MY BOYS, VOL. 1 OF AUNT JO’S SCRAP-BAG
(LONDON, 1871; 1872)

The boys and girls will be delighted, – we can vouch for two enthusiastic ones already, – with the announcement that Messrs. Roberts Brothers, Boston, have in press, and are to issue on the first of next month, a new volume by Miss Alcott, under the taking title of “Aunt Jo’s Scrap Book,” and containing twelve stories, the opening one being called “My Boys,” being a personal history of some characters in Miss Alcott’s books with whom all the world are familiar.

The Literary World 2.7 (1 December 1871): 105–06.

As the kindly housewife, making pies on a Saturday, transforms the surplus paste into miniature turnovers, for the special delectation of the children, so Miss Alcott, with the materials left over from “Little Women” and “Little Men,” has fabricated this roly-poly pudding for younger readers. Here are the very same ingredients – cheerfulness, graceful humor, piquancy of thought and expression, homely common sense, and, in largest proportion, hearty enthusiasm about little folks, and all that concerns them, manipulated with the same discriminating skill, and perfected with a not inferior “bake” to those which crowned the more pretentious products of the author’s literary kitchen. Between these latter and this little volume, as between the grown-up pies and the adolescent turnovers, there is only the difference of size.

Most of the stories in the “Scrap-Bag” are now published for the first time, while a few will be recognized as old and dear friends. All are simple, natural, full of unaffected feeling, and luminous with that property, almost peculiar to Miss Alcott’s compositions, of brightness. Like Nature, she makes no waste; she uses no more words than are necessary for the effective conveyance of her thought, and consequently never proses. We have not space to speak of each of the fourteen stories in this volume; but the first two, “My Boys” and “Teresa’s [Tessa’s] Surprises,” may be taken as fair samples of the whole. The latter is a touching little sketch of a wee Italian girl, who set her heart on buying some pretty things for her little brothers and sisters for Christmas, and of how she devised a scheme and successfully executed it. This story illustrates how genius can dignify the most commonplace incidents, and dress them in real beauty, just as an inspired French cook can make an appetizing soup of the meagrest fragments.

“My Boys” would seem to be a veritable chapter from experience. It tells about the author’s numerous love affairs – in her callow days, we mean – and narrates, in a charmingly humorous manner, the salient events in her relations with sundry and successive lovers. So piquant are some of these confessions, that the reader wishes they were very much longer. The episode of Augustus is really delicious, as fine a bit of nature as one could desire to see. More pathetic, but not less effective, is the story of the Polish boy, Ladislas, who, many of our readers will be glad to know, “was the original of Laurie [in ‘Little Women’], as far as a pale pen-and-ink sketch could embody a living, loving boy.” The volume contains some capital illustrations, by
Miss Ledyard, one of which refers to this scene:

“Cy was a comrade after my own heart, and for a summer or two we kept the neighborhood in a ferment by our adventures and hair-breadth escapes.”

[Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

Boston Daily Advertiser
118.136 (8 December 1871): 2:2.

Miss L. M. Alcott has prepared a book for the season, which will not fail to be popular among the little folk she has so often and so successfully entertained. It is entitled Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag, and contains a number of short stories written in her most engaging style and possessing peculiar interest from the fact that in them are told many things about the real boys and girls who suggested to her the imaginary people who live in her other stories.

The Providence Daily Journal 43.138
(11 December 1871): [1]:5.

Messrs. Roberts Brothers, of Boston, publish the long anticipated “Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag,” by the favorite author, Miss Alcott. The stories are inimitably funny, fresh, piquant and magnetic; nobody else could make them so interesting. The illustration of the thirteen little pigs with their tails cut off, floating over sleeping “Jo,” is irresistibly [irresistibly] ludicrous. There is no need to advise little men and women to invest in the “Scrap Bag,” for we see them going off by hundreds and thousands.

The Commonwealth
10.16 (16 December 1871): [1]:5.

Miss Alcott has made up a very welcome Christmas gift for all her good little women and men, including the old-fashioned girls and boys, by collecting together a portion of her numerous stories, old and new, which she christens Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag. A couple of delicately sentimental and humorous illustrations set off the work, and as for the rest, the freshness, the sweetness and applicability of the stories will remain with the grateful and gratified reader through all his after life.

Springfield Daily Republican 28.299
(18 December 1871): 2:1.

Miss Alcott’s new book of stories – Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag – would be easily recognized as hers even if her name were not attached to them. Some are new and some are not so new, – some are purely American and of New England like her former books, while others are colored with her European experiences, but all have the marks of her cheerful, conscientious moral activity, her humor and pathos and her careless literary execution, which has lately called
down the censure of Col Higginson. Such criticism is almost lost on Miss Alcott, who changes her style very slowly, and does not fully appreciate what literary excellence is. But her books are popular, and will remain so a reasonable length of years, because they have merits which appeal to the heart more than to the critical faculty. The new book is smaller on the page and, to our thinking, handsomer than her former ones; the illustrations by Miss Ledyard are sprightly and good.

([1871?]). Clippings File.

Those who have supposed that Miss Alcott was losing her power as a writer of stories may find the illusion dispelled in her *Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag*. There are just a dozen of little sketches, all pleasant reading for the young folks, as we happen to know. The book is hardly the one for the Sunday School, for beyond a vein of morality running here and there, there is an absence of any religious thought appealing to the highest needs and aims of our boys and girls. But the sketches are pleasant reading, nevertheless.

*Zion’s Herald* 49.3 (18 January 1872): 29:3.

*Aunt Joe’s Scrap-Bag*, by Miss Alcott (Roberts Bros), is a bag full of many colors, and those bright, of silk more than cotton, of gold threads and ragged lace, which is still lace; just the stuff for doll’s dresses, and for the little girls who are mothers of dolls.

*Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine* 84.501 (March 1872): 290.

A new semi-juvenile book from Miss Alcott! What need we say more? A collection of interesting sketches, first and best among which is “My Boys.”
These little stories are in every way worthy of the authoress of “Little Women.” They will be read with the sincerest pleasure by thousands of children, and in that pleasure there will not be a single forbidden ingredient. “My Boys,” which, opening upon by chance, we read through at a sitting, is charming. Ladislas, the noble, sweet-tempered Pole, is the original of Laurie, ever to be remembered by all “Aunt Jo’s” readers.


The large and increasing circle of juveniles who sit enchanted year in and out round the knees of Miss Alcott will hail with delight the publication of “Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag.” The most taking of these taking tales is, to our fancy, “My Boys;” but all possess the quality which made “Little Women” so widely popular, and the book will be welcomed and read from Maine to Florida.


Dear Aunt Jo! You are embalmed in the thoughts and loves of thousands of little men and little women. Your scrap-bag is rich in its stores of good things. Pray do not close and put it away quite yet.

This is Louisa Alcott’s Christmas tribute to the young people, and it is, like herself, good. In making selections, “Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag” must not be forgotten. There gives a rather startling glimpse into the precocious freedom of American children that the idea of the “joke” could ever have occurred of changing places with their papa and mamma for a whole day, and exercising upon them all the rules and regulations which have been such heavy burdens! But, in spite of this protest, we have found the book very pleasant to read.

The Athenaeum 2341 (7 September 1872): 303.

Aunt Joe’s Scrap Bag, by Louisa M. Alcott (Low & Co.), is a collection of fugitive tales and sketches, which we should have been very sorry to lose. Miss Alcott’s boys and girls are always delightful in her hands; she throws a loving glamour over them, and she loves them herself so heartily that it is not possible for the reader to do otherwise. The story called ‘Tessa’s Surprises’ is the one we like best, though we laughed heartily over ‘The Children’s Joke’; but it is altogether so revolutionary, or, as Kitty expresses it, “everything is so turned round,” that although we cordially subscribe to the moral, that children ought not to be worried by constant fault-finding and petty injunctions, it still remains a fact, that children are not the best judges of what is good for them, and that, on the whole, parents love them better than any one is ever likely to do in this world.
will be a vacant place where this little volume is not.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

*Boston Daily Evening Transcript* 44.12,771 (22 November 1871): 2:2.


*Boston Daily Evening Transcript* 44.12,789 (7 December 1871): 2:2.


*Eclectic Magazine* n.s. 15.2 (February 1872): Sup. 2.
Since Montaigne visited Rome we venture to say no traveler has written about that Eternal city with so much nonchalance as Miss Alcott in her new book – Shawl Straps – which is an itinerary or book of travels on a new plan, best described by quoting her whole short preface. She says:

There is a sort of fate about writing books of travel which it is impossible to escape. [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

Miss Lavinia, for short called Livy, is Miss Alcott herself of course, and the way she and her sister and sister’s friend, Miss B., here called Amanda, spent a winter in Rome is thus described, –

Rome.
They indulged in all pastimes modern Rome afforded. [Remainder of 5 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

London was more to Miss Alcott’s taste, as we gather from the opening of the chapter about that city and the country of which it is the capital, where she had spent pleasant hours before this particular visit in company with her two traveling companions. Here it is: –

London.
“From this moment I cease to be the commander-in-chief.” [Remainder of 17 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

There are chapters about the voyage over, Brittany, France, Switzerland, Italy, and London, and we have quoted here only from the two last. But here is a portrait from the French chapter, describing a day on a railroad train: –

The Reverend Boy.
They ate, drank, sung, gossiped, slept, read, and reveled, till another passenger got in, when propriety clothed them as with a garment, and the mirthful damsels became three studious statues. [Remainder of 2 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

As will be seen, there is great liveliness and freedom from the common conventionalities of tourists who write books, in these off-handed sketches of Miss Alcott’s. They may be compared with the volumes of Mrs Hunt and Mr Warner about Europe, though the resemblance is not very strong even to those. The new book is not for children in any special sense, though they will read it with pleasure and so will thousands of grown people.
still supported her old husband of ninety eight. [6 sentences omitted.]

**Boston Daily Advertiser**

“Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag” was not emptied when one volume came out of it. Roberts Brothers have issued a second volume entitled *Shawl Straps*, which is a book of travel with most of the travel left out. It is in fact a brisk and rollicking narrative of the incidents that befell a party of three ladies, of whom Miss Louise M. Alcott was one, who took a run through France, Switzerland, Italy and London just for fun, so far as the book reveals any motive. What they saw and what they learned do not count for much in the story, but what a good time they had! When Miss Alcott begins writing dull books we will make a note of it, but for the present it will be safe to buy whatever she chooses to print, in confident anticipation of enjoyment.

**Boston Evening Transcript**
45.13,085 (29 November 1872): Sup. 2:1.

There are some books the mere mention of which is sufficient to indicate their quality and awaken an eager desire to read them . . . To say that “Shawl-Straps” is the second volume of Miss L. M. Alcott’s “Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag,” and a narrative of that lively writer’s travel, with congenial companions in Europe, bright, sketchy, and full of humor, is enough said to be an assurance of its acceptableness.

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**M., L. C. New-York Tribune**
32.9877 (29 November 1872): 6:2.

I have left myself little space in which to speak of Miss Alcott’s “Shawl-Straps;” but the readers of “Little Women” need to hear little more of her books than the author’s name. “Shawl-Straps” is, however, very unlike its predecessors. It is a book of travels, about writing which the author says there is a sort of fate, that it is impossible to escape.

The only way in which this infliction may be lightened to a long-suffering public is to make the work as cheerful and as short as possible. [1 sentence omitted.]

In this magnanimous resolution, which spared us the well-worn topics of the guide-books, and confined the tale, instead, to personal adventures, is the charm of the book. When Miss Alcott writes about a place, she does not give you the hight of the cathedral or the dimensions of the altar-pictures, or the designs of the stained-glass in the windows. She gives you, instead, the atmosphere and its life. In Brittany you know how the natives worked, and marketed, and married, and quarreled, and gossiped; and in the midst of all you see the three girls – who were the shawl-strappists – and you perceive just how all these sights impressed them, not only, but how they impressed the foreign people among whom they wandered and wondered. There is a curious sense of frankness about the book. You are taken into confidence, and you know all their little good and ill fortunes; you dine and dream and shop with them; laugh at their fun, and sympathize with their vexations;
you visit Brittany, and France proper, and Switzerland, and Italy, and London; and perhaps you fall in love with the last, as did Lavinia, the oldest of the three travelers. She went, among other lion-hunts, to see Spurgeon, and found him with “a square, florid face, a stout figure, a fine keen eye, and a natural, decided manner, very impressive. [1 sentence omitted.]” Now and then he stopped, it appears, to give directions for the comfort of his flock in a free and easy manner which called up irresistible smiles on the faces of strangers.

“Mrs. Flacker, you’d better take that child into the ante-room: he’s tired.” [3 sentences omitted.]

The story of this traveling partnership – which was founded on the European tour of Miss Alcott herself, her sister, and a young lady from Boston, of course lovely and literary – proves the one thing, that ladies can travel with ease, comfort, and propriety without a gentleman for escort duty. Here were three, quite unlike in tastes and temperament, who lived happily together for twelve long months, traveled unprotected over land and sea in safety, experienced two revolutions, an earthquake, an eclipse, and a flood, yet met with no loss, no mishap, no quarrel, and no disappointment worth mentioning.


This very indefinite title is imposed upon a record of the author’s journeyings in Europe, which might as appropriately have been called “Lunch Box,” or “Sherry Flask,” so far as the unenformed reader is concerned. In due time, however, he is apprised that the title “Shawl Straps” is supposed to indicate that the travellers – for there were three of them – abandoned their baggage train and made their campaign with personal equipage as meagre as that of Gen. Grant in his movement against Vicksburg – one clean shirt and a tooth-brush. In fact, the three lone, lorn females did, at a certain stage in their journey, desert their “Saratogas,” and for a season travelled in light order. That this season was a brief one, it is hardly necessary to say; a woman divorced from her trunk en voyage, presents one of the most painful exhibitions of anguish that human nature ever affords. It is worthy of note that the chapters of the book which treat of this trunkless – we had almost said truncated – time, are far less spirited and jolly than their associates which deal with a period of habilimental opulence, and reflect faithfully the serene and self-satisfied condition of the author’s mind.

The three friends – Misses Lavinia, styled an old maid, Matilda and Amanda – sail from New York for Brest, and the story of their voyage forms one of the six chapters of the book. It is excellently told, and is a spicy antepast to the entertainment that follows. There are few better brief descriptions of a short sea-voyage than this: –

“Great heavens, what a week that was! Rain, wind, fog; creak, pitch, toss, noise, smells, cold.” [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

Miss Alcott makes her sojourn in Brittany, which was evidently delightful to her, hardly less so to the reader. The odd pictures of Breton life appealed powerfully to her sense of the humorous, and she has depicted them con amore. Her picture of the cheery old female porter is a gem, and her portraits of Mlle. Pelagie
and the members of her family are drawn with inimitable skill. One’s face is kept at a sustained grin throughout this chapter only when disturbed by the ebullition of an irrepressible laugh. The queer costumes and equipages and social usages; the unaccountable contentment of the Breton women under galling masculine tyranny, which obliges them to keep house, rear children, knit garments of all kinds, keep shops and markets, till gardens, clean streets, and buy and sell cattle, “leaving the men free to enjoy the only pursuits they seemed inclined to follow – breaking horses, mending roads and getting drunk;” the rude furnishing of peasants’ houses; the pigs; the donkeys; in fine, every constituent of the strange world she was sojourning in, that could be brought into the service of fun, Miss Alcott has seized upon and felicitously utilized. But, droll as these pages are, they are not wholly destitute of instruction. They give one a reasonably clear idea of the Breton character and life, though it is necessary to make allowance for exaggeration in the author’s statements of fact.

In the chapter entitled “France” the shawl-strap saunter is described. The independent tourists loitered through sundry old French towns, Tours, Le Mans, Amboise, etc., seeing little that was worth recording and doing hardly more. Their encounters with members of the other sex seemed to be the most momentous events in their experience, and journey as they would, they never could escape their own atmosphere, which is heavy with young ladyish pertnesses, and sooner or later oppresses the reader. The pleasure afforded by their residence in Switzerland is evidently “not transferable.” In that classic land they found little of interest, except St. Bernard dogs, some travellers like themselves, about whom they gossiped, and two or three garçons of marked personal beauty and chivalrous deportment.

In pleasing contrast with the tameness of those chapters which immediately precede it, the chapter on Rome is uniformly vivacious with a vivacity that is easy and not forced. The inundation and the visit of Victor Emmanuel are touched with discriminating skill, – just enough stress being laid on each to make it interesting to the reader. The sketch of London experience is entitled to equal praise.

There are many pages in this volume, and it will, no doubt, be read with avidity by many thousand persons. But if nine-tenths of these were asked to render a reason for their admiration of it, they would find it difficult to get beyond the adjective “jolly.” We are not sure that they would not thus fairly and sufficiently characterize the work. It is “jolly,” bright, readable; for any higher qualities of excellence we presume the author will make no claim in its behalf.

Springfield Daily Union
(4 December 1872): 2:3.

Shawl Straps, by Louisa M. Alcott, is the second volume of Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag, and is a rollicking [rollicking] account of the experiences of three women, traveling without any “male protector,” to Europe, and is a delightful little book.

Hartford Daily Courant

We quoted recently from Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s second volume of “Aunt Jo’s
Scrap-Bag” which she calls Shawl-Straps, so that our readers know something of its lively contents. It is not very much a book of travel, and yet it has entirely to do with the wanderings of Aunt Livy, Matilda and Miranda in foreign lands, a lively, witty, audacious and somewhat pert party of young ladies whose conversation would be entertaining whether they talked about Rome or Boston. They went to Brest in a French steamer, sauntered in quaint Brittany and in French country towns, wandered in Italy, lived in Rome, and visited London. Although there is no set description anywhere, we are permitted to see the daily life of these chatty, “jolly” and irrepressible [irrepressible] girls, and in seeing that we get a better idea of what they saw than from many conscientious books of laborious travelers. The young ladies have not much more reverence for classic ground than Mark Twain. Miss Lavinia says, the day the party left Rome for Albano:

“When I get the contents of my head sorted out, I shall doubtless rejoice that I have seen Rome; but just now all that I can clearly recall are the three facts that the Pope had a fit, our dear man Romeo got very tipsy one night, and that we went to see the Sistine Chapel the day the eclipse made it as dark as a pocket.” [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

The chapter devoted to Brittany contains more that is new to general readers than others and is delightful throughout; but there is not a dull page in the little volume. Aside from its sprightly dialogue and dashing spirit of adventure, it abounds in flashing touches of description [description], like the following, of the voyage over:

“Great heavens, what a week that was!” [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

**Lawrence Daily American**


*Shawl Straps* is the second of Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag Series, by that ever welcome writer, Miss Louise M. Alcott, issued by Roberts Brothers, uniform with the earlier volume. In addition to her vivacity and freshness, there is perhaps no writer who makes her characters appear more *real* and life-like than Miss Alcott; this *Scrap Bag* is a very treasure house of good things, – rare bits of silk and satin, – rich folds of velvet, and quaint fragments of laces and edgings, – and all made so new and attractive under the skillful touch of Aunt Jo’s hand. *Shawl Straps* is a humorous account of the author’s European trip, – but no one need lay it aside thinking it only a dry, – as too many are, – book of travel, for there is scarcely a page in which the vivaciousness of the writer does not peep out, while many of the events of the journey are invested with an air of downright jollity. It is every way a capital volume, and will increase the admirers of its bright author.

**Zion’s Herald**

49.50 (12 December 1872): 591:3.

– a most admirable volume of European travels, written as only this inimitable “Aunt” can, amusing and instructing even the youngest children.
Miss Alcott’s *Shawl-Straps*, being volume two of “Aunt Joe’s Scrap-Bag” – of which “My Boys” was volume one – gives in an unique and original way an account of the author’s recent European visit. It avoids all the conventional features of the sight-seers’ usual stories, and records only those phases of the trip which are sure of a general welcome. It is cheerful, lively, sufficient – worthy of the pen which has peopled the world with so many charming characters and given new ideas of life and the possibility of happiness.

**New-York Tribune 32.9896 (21 December 1872): 6:1.**

So, also, will Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s new offering to her many friends [“be popular with a large class of readers”], *Shawl-Straps* (Roberts Bros.), a sketch of the adventures of three typical New-England girls, who, without baggage, “do” Europe. With the stock of external audacity, and slanginess, and internal mixture of culture, refinement, and vulgarity, which Miss Alcott (who ought to know them) sees fit to confer on them, “Shawl-Straps” is enlivened by some charming and tender bits of description here and there, in spite of a certain annoying eruptive flippancy, which is not wit and is just the book to fasten up in shawl-straps, with a waterproof or railway lunch, to beguile the way from station to station. There is a cordial heartiness and freshness in Miss Alcott that makes all the world her friend, whether among the old women of Brittany or the artistic *haute noblesse* of Rome, or here among her old familiar acquaintances.

**The British Quarterly Review (American edition) 57.[1] (January 1873): 152**

The author of ‘Little Women’ will not easily tire young folks of Aunt Jo. To write about her is Miss Alcott’s fate – to which she says she is drawn as by a fascination. This charming little book is a reminiscence of travel in Brittany, France, Switzerland, Italy, and London. Under the guide of Miss Lavinia the sights are seen, while Miss Alcott’s pen describes them and sets them in a framework of graceful personal history and dialogue.

**Appletons’ Journal 9.197 (1 January 1873): 28.**

A new book of travel is always welcome, and never more so than when in the style of such a sprightly author as Miss Alcott. In her last work, “Shawl-Straps” (Roberts Bros.), she sustains her reputation as one of the most vivacious and original of writers.

**Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine 86.512 (February 1873): 187.**

Miss Alcott is another writer for children, whose books we always feel pleasure in
noticing. They are so natural, so witty, so full of invention and character. This tells of a tour through Europe made by three sisters, whose adventures, serious and comic, will help to pass away many a dull winter evening. Miss Alcott’s style is so spirited that she carries us along with her, all over Europe, if need be.

The Ladies’ Repository

Miss Louisa M. Alcott has done up a European tour in a little volume called Aunt Jo’s Scrap-bag; or, Shawl-straps – embodying description, incident, and dialogue; illustrating Brittany, France, Switzerland, Italy, and London. Miss Alcott’s style combines, to a rare degree, fascination and profit.


One hardly knows whether to class Shawl-Straps (Roberts Brothers) with fiction or with books of travel. It is the latter under the guise of the former. The travelers are three girls, and their perpetual conversation, which sometimes becomes a chatter, gives to the tour a dramatic form if not a truly dramatic interest. Miss Alcott’s style is so well known that we can not better characterize this little volume than by simply saying that it is her last book. It is always vivacious, but not always natural and simple. It contains a good deal of fresh information and but little that is stale, and on the whole affords a decidedly agreeable method of visiting the places it describes – Brittany, France, Switzerland, Italy, and Sweden [London].

The Catholic World 17.97 (April 1873): 142–43.

This book is written in a light, trifling, flippant style, which may be very pleasant and appropriate when used to describe certain things, but when applied indiscriminately to all that one sees abroad, it certainly is not agreeable, to say the least of it. Neither is it pleasant, in a book of travels, to find that nothing is considered true, or even worthy of respect, unless the author believes in it. A Mass at S. Mark’s, Venice, is described in this way: “The patriarch was a fat old soul in red silk, even to his shoes and holy pocket-handkerchief; and the service appeared to consist in six purple priests dressing and undressing him like an old doll, while a dozen white gowned boys droned up in a gold cockloft, and many beggars whined on the floor below.” A visit to the Carthusian Convent, Pavia, calls forth the following comment: “A nice way for lazy men to spend their lives, when there is so much work to be done for the Lord and his poor! Wanted to shake them all round,” etc. In the description of the inundation of parts of the city of Rome we read: “Livy indulged the sinful hope that the pope would get his pontifical petticoats very wet, be a little drowned and terribly scared by the flood, because he spoiled the Christmas festivities,” etc. Victor Emmanuel is spoken of as “the honest man,” with the remark that “that is high praise for a king.” Such expressions as “sullen old gentleman in the Vatican,” “silly Madonna,” and others of the same character, enliven the pages in various places.
We can scarcely believe that this book is from the same pen as *Little Women*, and we think it would be far better, when one is only willing to see things through their ignorance and prejudices, not to attempt to make others see with their eyes.

**The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review**

*n.s. 43.2 (1 April 1873): 631–32.*

“A piece of soap, and I am ready to start,” said one of our generals at the Horse Guards in reply to the question when he should be prepared to conduct a campaign. “Shawl-straps, and I am ready to go round the world,” cries Miss Alcott, “provided my trunks are sent forward by luggage-train.” This is one of the many morals of her charming little book. But it contains a great deal besides. Miss Alcott describes the adventures of three American ladies through Europe. Amanda is the guide through France, Switzerland and Italy; Lavinia, for her knowledge of the language, through England; whilst Matilda acts as a general female Murray and Bradshaw combined. We are not surprised to hear of Italian Counts madly falling in love with them, or of enthusiastic antiquarians dividing their books and treasures with them. They carry good spirits wherever they go. In fact the authoress is sometimes obliged to apologize for their vagaries. She confesses that Lavinia in Italy pursued the romantic in a style that was a disgrace to her years, whilst Amanda on one occasion almost compromised her nation, and Matilda defied the power of European despots by wildly going about, like a free-born American girl, without a passport. For this, however, she was justly punished. Not even the freest-born American can be allowed to commit such high treason. For this offence she had to be humiliated to the post of ladysmaid, and to go for a time without her jewellery and those beautiful gloves of which we hear so much. This is surely punishment enough to satisfy the sternest European official. The adventures which these three American ladies went through are certainly exciting. At Lugano they witnessed an opera in bedgowns and bedquilts. At Florence they enjoyed a little earthquake, whilst at Rome the Tiber, so to speak, was turned on for their especial benefit, and a flood was the result. We regret to say that the art-criticisms of these ladies are very profane. They appear to have seen little in the Italian churches and galleries but “green saints in whirlwinds of pink angels.” But amidst all their pleasantry we find plenty of sober criticism, acute observation, and charming descriptions. The chapter on Brittany is particularly good. The authoress however, reserves all her prettiest compliments for England and the English. Modesty alone prevents us from giving a quotation. But we should advise all our readers to turn to the book and see for themselves what a really nice set of people we are.

**Morning Star.** Quoted in front matter of *Cupid and Chow-Chow*, by Alcott (1874): n.p.

Nobody expects from Miss Alcott any thing but books of the raciest qualities and the choicest flavors. This story of her foreign travel, in company with two female friends, is just as vivacious and unique as
anything previously issued with her name on the title-page. One may have read the narratives and notes of forty tourists over the same field, but he cannot afford to neglect this story. He will find nothing repeated either in substance or form. It is a new vein that is here worked, and the products are all singularly fresh. It is a rare literary bundle which these shawl-straps enclose.


Roberts Brothers have published a small volume the mere announcement of which is enough to insure its circulation. This volume is “Shawl-Straps,” a second part of “Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag,” by Louisa M. Alcott, – a name well known to all “little men,” and “little women,” and “old-fashioned girls,” now inhabiting the country. The book is a racy, almost rollicking account of the personal experiences of three American women travelling in France, Switzerland, Italy, and England.

Miss Alcott carefully abstains from writing what is called a book of travels, and confines herself to giving an amusing account of what really occurred to herself and her two companions. Thus, in London, the party devoted much more time in hunting up Dickens’s characters than in visiting “leading objects of interest.” They nearly succeeded in finding Mrs. Gamp, and actually took “weal pie and porter” at Mrs. Todger’s. The description of Spurgeon and his congregation is the most life-like we have ever read. Indeed the whole tone of the book is that of conversation, in which the familiarity of ordinary talk is accompanied with more than ordinary certainty of phrase, so that her readers may, in some sense, be said to join the party and become “Shawl-Strappists” themselves. It may be added that one is never tired of any record of a foreign tour which makes him or her a companion of the journey; and, as Miss Alcott succeeds in doing this, the principal objection which will be made to her book is its shortness.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices


*Eclectic Magazine* n.s. 17.1 (January 1873): Sup. 2.


*St. Nicholas* 1.1 (November 1873): 45.
WORK: A STORY OF EXPERIENCE (1873)
Miss Alcott’s last book is admirable. It is interesting enough as a story to win and hold innumerable readers, while its healthful tone, its thorough nobleness, its pure democracy and practical Christianity cannot be over-praised. It is indeed a story of work; – of constant, useful labor, with no shining rewards of riches, position or worldly honors, but with the immeasurably greater ones of “independence, education, happiness and religion.” The heroine is Christie Devon, an orphan, living in the country with a kind old aunt and a crabbed, parsimonious old uncle, to whom she was a burden. At twenty she determined to be independent, to travel away into the world and seek her fortune. She had no special gifts; she was not a beauty or a genius; but she had youth, health, a brave, warm heart, a willing spirit, and, thanks partly to her parents and partly to Aunt Betsy, those most convenient endowments, – capacity and common sense. She first went as a servant to Mrs. Stuart, a would-be intellectual and aesthetic leader in the society of Little Babel; there she did her work well, gained some wisdom and more amusement from Mrs. Stuart’s receptions, and formed a lasting friendship with Hepsey, the cook, a fugitive slave of the best type. An accident caused Christie to leave Mrs. Stuart, and she decided not to go out to service again, for she knew that she could never live with Irish mates, and probably would not find another Hepsey. She could not find the place she wanted, so she took the best that offered, and became an actress at a respectable theatre. Her parts were subordinate, but she played as well as she could and was cheerful, modest, attentive and obliging. She made one or two hits in her small parts, and was promoted, as she found favor with Mr. Kent, who belonged to the old school and rarely condescended to praise modern actors. His own style was so admirable that he was justly considered the first comedian in the country, and was the pride and mainstay of the old theatre where he had played for years. Of course he possessed much influence in that little world, and, being a kindly man, used it generously to keep up any young aspirant who seemed to him deserving. So Christie’s life was not unpleasant; but when her conscience told her it was not good for her, she turned her back to possible fame and became a governess.

The next turn of fortune’s wheel made her the companion of a beautiful insane girl, and the sharer in a fearful family tragedy. Then she became a dressmaker, and learned something of the hardness of women, and fell into despair, but was saved and found her home in the quietest and loveliest of families, where she helped in out-door work as well as in-door, and where, although she was paid wages, she shared in all the comforts, the pleasures and the affection of the family. All these experiences Miss Alcott describes vividly, showing clearly the lights and shadows of each condition. From the home which was indeed home to her, Christie went to be a hospital nurse during the war; and here the story tells of the heroism and the infinite pathos that filled those years of sublime self-sacrifice and suffering. There is more than one love story woven into the tale; and there are passages of humor and of homely, ungrammatical wisdom scattered abundantly through it and relieving its sombre
tints. Christie is not the only worker in the story; there is Rachel, her friend; and David, the gardener, a plain hero in a suit of gray; and Cynthyl Wilkins, a perfect sunflower of a woman, always beam- ing, always in bright color, always brave and true and loving; and above all there is the great worker, Theodore Parker, — Miss Alcott calls him Thomas Power, — “a sturdy man of fifty, with a keen, brave face, penetrating eyes, and mouth a little grim; but a voice so resonant and sweet it reminded one of silver trumpets, and stirred and won the hearer with irresistible power. Rough gray hair, and all the features rather rugged, as if the Great Sculp- tor had blocked out a grand statue and left the man’s own soul to finish it.” To him came the weak and the lonely, the misplaced, the wronged and the suffer- ing, as well as the strong and brave, the grand and powerful of the land. To each he ministered according to his need, giving sympathy, encouragement, advice, reproof and practical help; pouring out the love of his great heart, and using the strength of his mind and body to set all wrongs right. He stirred crowds because he stirred each individual, because he worked for individ- uals, and no one was too small for his care. He turned from the mighty battering-rams which he was driving against the walls of a popular theology, and gave himself earnestly and lovingly to finding a home for some forlorn baby, or a place of service where a tired and lonely woman could find peace and happiness. His life comes fitly into a story of work. “Deeds, not Words,” was his motto, and under his guidance Christie found her true work. He is one of the heroes of the book, and from the many pleasant things told of him, we quote this: “One evening of each week was set apart by Mr. Power for the reception of whom- soever chose to visit him; for his parish was a large one, and his house a safe haunt for refugees from all countries, all oppres- sions. [1 sentence omitted.]” Then follows a sketch of one of these gatherings:

In one corner a newly imported German with an Orson-like head, thumb-ring, and the fragrance of many meerschaums still hovering about him, was hammering away upon some dis- puted point with a scientific French- man, whose national politeness was only equalled by his national volubil- ity. [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

The chief persons of the story have real dignity of character, unaffected by their circumstances; it might be called a story of character, as well as a story of experience; and this gives it great worth. Mr. Power ap- plied to David Sterling the fine saying that “the essence of greatness is the perception that virtue is enough.” The book is imbued with that spirit, and it might well stand on the title-page with the other motto which the author has chosen from Carlyle, “An endless significance lies in work; in idle- ness alone is there perpetual despair.” Miss Alcott does not theorize about any so- cial problems, she has nothing to say of the relations between labor and capital, of strikes, financial reforms, or trades unions; but she shows in a simple, earnest, realistic way, without rhetoric, poetry or passion, how honorable work is, and how happy workers may be; she deals chiefly with women, unlike in station, education and experience, and shows how they all, em- ployed and employers, can work together, can add to each other’s happiness, can live without jealousy, oppression or unfaith- fulness. She shows, too, how true work, how what is called a hard life, develops a tender and noble character, and she often alludes to the touching beauty of expres- sion seen in plain faces; “for no deep ex- perience, bravely borne, can fail to leave its mark, often giving power in return for patience, and lending a subtle loveliness to faces whose bloom it has destroyed.”
If half the thousands who will read this book will profit by it and put its lessons into practice, it will do more good in the working world than all the labor-reform conventions ever held, and all the speeches and pamphlets on the subject ever printed. It is not a new gospel, but the old one told anew, and applied to the troubles of today.

Miss Alcott’s new story, “Work,” just from the press of Roberts Brothers, needs not the added attraction of the twenty striking illustrations from drawings by Sol. Eytinge [Eytinge], to give it favor with the public. It is the story of a girl who starts out full of hope, and in a spirit of independence, to work her way in the world, and tells what she had accomplished, and suffered, and enjoyed, and the position she had reached at the age of forty. It recites the trials she endured as a house servant, actress, governess, companion and seamstress, and how she was strengthened and helped by them, and as she was romantic withal, there is a loose history woven in, together with an experience as army nurse, and finally as a general counsellor and guide to younger friends needing assistance and advice. There is no mistaking the purpose of the author. She believes it respectable to work, and wishes to encourage women to help themselves, and as she usually succeeds in what she undertakes, we expect thousands will profit by it, as we are sure they will read this most interesting volume, which is likely to be a rival in popularity with the best of her previous books.

Miss Louise M. Alcott’s “Work,” her novel to which she has devoted herself so assiduously the past year, intent on making it her best production, is to be published on the 15th. There is much to praise about it and much to criticise. It is a terribly earnest book. Its aim is very much like that of Mrs. A. D. T. Whitney in “The Other Girls,” to show the position that women might hold in the business world, to demonstrate the character of the work that a woman can do if she will, without sacrificing her self-respect, and to break down certain prejudices which women, as well as men, entertain towards certain classes of women and certain classes of occupations. But it is more open in following its aim, and less bright and brilliant. Those who have learned to know Miss Alcott through her charming “Little Women” and “Little Men” and her “Aunt Jo” books, will miss in this much of the sparkle, the rollicking humor, the crisp, sharply-pointed sentences and the cheery lightness of those. Yet I apprehend that few of the thousands who will read it will pronounce it dull or stupid, or fail to find in it much pleasure with no little profit. “Work” is, there is no use to attempt to hide it, a sermon, and a homely one; but the sugar-coat to the pill is deliciously sweet, and few will be found to frown as they take it. Christie, the heroine, is carried through various experiences and extraordinary circumstances from page one to something above four hundred and fifty, to demonstrate what a woman can...
do if she will. It is not a rosy path that she treads. The book opens with her “declaration of independence.” She is an orphan; her mother was, like herself, a New England country girl, “who had borne the commonplace life of home till she could bear it no longer, then had gone away to teach, as most country girls are forced to do, had met, loved, and married a poor gentleman, and, after a few years of genuine happiness, untroubled even by much care and poverty, had followed him out of the world, leaving her little child to the protection of her brother.” Christie makes her declaration of independence to her “Aunt Betsey,” a good old soul, on baking-day, in the kitchen, over the pies and cakes, just before her twenty-first birthday, and that night unfolds her plans, to go out and work her way, to her “Uncle Enos,” a hard, crusty New England farmer, a type of so many whose soul is pretty much in his bonds and his stocking of savings; and who don’t understand her, and makes no secret of it. Christie points to the fire to show her aunt what she wants:

“What do you want, child?” [8 additional paragraphs omitted.]

So Christie starts out, her inheritance “a head, a heart, a pair of hands; also the dower of most New England girls, intelligence, courage, and common sense, many practical gifts, and, hidden under the reserve that soon melts in a genial atmosphere, much romance and enthusiasm, and the spirit which can rise to heroism when the great moment comes.” She goes to “the city,” probably Boston, with two hundred dollars which Uncle Enos gives her, somewhat grudgingly, to be sure, takes a room on the top floor of a cheap boarding-house, and looks about for work. She goes the usual round without success, and then at last resolves to begin at the bottom of the ladder, and start as a domestic, “for in those days foreign help had not driven farmers’ daughters out of the field, and made domestic comfort a lost art.” In sketching Christie’s mistress, Miss Alcott seizes the opportunity to shoot a little shaft at fashionable followers of art. Madame had been abroad and had learned to affect art; when Christie called she was intent upon a water-color copy of Turner’s “Rain, Wind and Hail” – “that pleasing work which was sold upside down, and no one found it out. Motioning Christie to a seat, she finished some delicate sloppy process before speaking.” In time, losing her place here, she becomes an actress, through the influence of a mother and daughter, both actresses, living in the boarding-house, to which she returns, and beginning as Queen of the Amazons, in “The Demon’s Daughter; or the Castle of the Sun!” and the most magnificent spectacle ever produced on the American stage!!!” [sic] – not, however, in the costume of the day, which, Miss Alcott hastens to inform her readers –

“As studies from the nude had not yet become one of the amusements of the élite of Little Babel, Christie was not required to appear in the severe simplicity of a costume consisting of a necklace, sandals, and a bit of gold fringe about the waist, but was allowed an extra inch or two on her tunic.”

She makes rapid progress, getting the position of first soubrette at the next season, then advancing to stock actress and in time becoming the “city’s favorite.” This career closes with a grandly-successful “benefit,” a stage accident and a brain fever, out of which she wakes to a realization of the fact that she is wearing herself out, that she is not finding what she went out from Uncle Enos’s farmhouse to find, and that the boards must be deserted by her if she would attain the noblest end
of her ambition. So she cuts loose from her theatrical friends, who show their kind hearts during her illness, and becomes a governess for the neglected children of a lady of fashion. She follows her new mistress to the seaside, and there, after awhile, the lady’s brother, Mr. Philip Fletcher, a used-up man of fashion, rich, dyspeptic, proud, but with good parts, utterly tired of the life of fashion, falls in love with her, and asks her to marry him. She having discovered the growth of his love before his proposal, though sorely tempted to say “Yes,” dazzled just a little by the prospect of a life in the future with a rich husband and “a place in society,” amazes him by saying “No,” and quits this place. Then she becomes companion to an invalid in a sorrowful household, over which hangs the doom of hereditary insanity, and here demonstrates the possession of rare traits and powers, admitting of the best descriptive writing and character sketching in the book. From here she tumbles suddenly and unreasonably. The tragic death of her charge ends her work in the sorrowful household, and, though she is implored to remain as “one of the family,” she resolves to go away, being worn and wearyed by the unusual strain that has been upon her. She rests awhile, again at the old boarding-house, then becomes a seamstress in a great workshop. Then she is drawn to Rachel, a quiet, skilful creature, who sits alone by herself in the great company of girls, and “whose face was that of one who had known some great sorrow, some deep experience.” Rachel proves to have once committed the great sin, to have long ago repented, and to have tried ever since to atone. Her dreadful secret is at length discovered in the great workroom, and in a storm of virtuous indignation the poor sister is cast out. Christie makes an earnest defence for her, and a noble effort to prevent her disgrace; and when she goes out goes with her. Rachel will not listen to her appeals to come and live and work with her, but disappears to try and work out her salvation alone. Christie then toils as a sewing girl. Work grows less and less, sickness overtakes her, she becomes penniless, and one night, wandering over one of the bridges, having failed to get money promised her for the little work she has succeeded in obtaining, finds her way to the water’s edge, and in a dreadful state of despair is on the very brink of suicide, when the faithful Rachel appears by her side and saves her. Rachel directs her to Mrs. Wilkins, a homely soul, with a big, warm heart, who takes her in without question in response to her plea, “Rachel sent me,” and befriends her in a most motherly and genuine fashion. From here Christie grows up almost as rapidly as she went down. Through Mrs. Wilkins’s minister, Mr. Power, she gets a place in the country in a Quaker family, wonderfully soon becomes more than a mere help in the garden to the Quaker’s son, David, and in the house to herself, and in time marries David just as he goes off to the war of the rebellion.

She follows him as a hospital nurse, sees him die in her arms, shot in endeavoring to help a slave woman with a baby escape from the rebels, comes back and has a child born to her, returns in time to Uncle Enos and cares for him till his death, then endeavors to do all the good she can for her working sisters and those in trouble, trying to do the work David could have done. The book closes with Christie at forty. She then makes her first speech in public since she left the stage, at a meeting of working women, urging the value of labor, emphasizing the point that through work the end sought would be found, and declaring herself ready to extend to all who sought to lift themselves up all the practical help in her power; and the book closes with the
unfolding of a plan of Christie’s to Bella, the sister of the poor insane girl to whom Christie has been a companion, to provide employment and pleasure for those dying of frivolity or ennui:

“Well, dear, I want you to make Harry’s home as beautiful and attractive as you can; to keep all the elegance and refinement of former times, and to add to it a new charm by setting the fashion of common sense.” [Remainder of 3 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

The Dr. Power in the book is Theodore Parker. Christie goes to his service on Sunday with Mrs. Wilkins, and what she sees and hears is thus sketched. Miss Alcott has given one of the best descriptions of Theodore Parker’s style and manner, and of the appearance of his people, which has of late years appeared in print:

“On the morrow Christie went early, got a good seat, and for half an hour watched the gathering of the motley congregation that filled the great hall.” [Remainder of 5 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

The book is well written and the idea of a novel is well sustained. The reader feels the genuine thrill when he suddenly discovers who Rachel is, after he had almost forgotten her, and what made David “a friend of girls;” when Philip Fletcher turns up again, and Christie is given one more chance for him, and the perplexing task of deciding which – David or Philip; and when Bella comes forward towards the last chapter. Miss Alcott has in this demonstrated her ability to write something higher than stories, and, doubtless, will follow her great work with something greater. Miss Alcott has in this demonstrated her ability to write something higher than stories, and, doubtless, will follow her great work with something greater. One is inclined to lose a little patience with this on account of its sudden “ups and downs,” and to drop into a little practical criticism. Christie, we are obliged to determine, did not certainly possess the virtue of prudence, though she had all else. Miss Alcott tells us that she earned thirty dollars a week as first soubrette in the theatre, and as she rose in her profession her salary must have increased proportionately. She was there three years, yet she was soon reduced in fortune after she left. Then, following the generous treatment from the sorrowful household with the insane daughter, she went down almost to suicide in a distressingly brief period. But these are after all no serious faults. The book will first be published in an edition of full fifteen thousand.

**Boston Evening Transcript**


A book like “Work,” sure to be read, “ordered” so largely while in the press, and commending itself by its topic as well as by the name of its author, needs no notice beyond the announcement of its issue by Roberts Brothers, in the tasteful style that has become a habit with that house, and is for sale by A. Williams & Co. It is bright and sensible: just what it purports to be, “A Story of Experience.” The heroine struggles through a variety of changes, plays many parts with more or less success, in her anxiety to be a useful and happy woman, and none of her sex can read of her trials and adventures, so brightly described, without being taught lessons worth knowing and remembering. In form it is fiction; in substance full of reality and truth. Miss Alcott has labored, and yet apparently the labor has been one of love, in this volume as in her other writings, to do lasting good, while furnishing hours of entertainment.
A new story by the author of “Little Women” is sure to attract thousands of readers. Miss Alcott’s last book (from the the [sic] press of Roberts Brothers) is named Work, and it has been called her best by some critics. We should hardly admit this, perhaps, but comparisons are odorous, – not to quote Mrs. Malaprop. It is a tale of a good, honest, natural, hopeful, striving girl, with a country training, who passes through the vicissitudes of parlor girl, actress, governess, companion, seamstress, and minister’s amanuensis. These and other experiences less unusual in variety modify and improve her character, which still retains its truthful simplicity, and fit her for a more exalted station. Over all, Miss Alcott, as a matter of course, sprinkles the fragrance of romance, and the finished book is one which women love, and men find mildly interesting, if no more.

“Miss Alcott’s New Novel: Its Characters and Characteristics.”

Miss Alcott has become one of the most popular writers of the time and country, and even in England has a great and increasing popularity. She seems to be looked upon across the ocean as a peculiarly American author, – with a manner of writing quite fresh, and unlike that of any European novelist. This is true; yet in America we have not been in the habit of thinking so, and many of our critics and men of literature have too often slighted her work and the author herself. This is the case with Mr Underwood, who, in his Handbook of American Literature, published last winter, gives but a single line to Miss Alcott while nearly six pages are allotted to Mr G. H. Boker. But the successful author can snap his fingers at the critics, implying by that gesture what Disraeli bluntly says, that a critic is an author who has not succeeded. And no author can be long successful without the manifestation of some qualities which cannot be overlooked by critics who have any right to give an opinion. Whether an author ever profits much by criticism may be doubted; even if he has the good fortune to fall in with just and searching critics. And it is quite certain that Miss Alcott has not received much good or harm from such criticism as her numerous books have called forth. She has written right along, out of the fullness of her heart, and has been much more intent on saying something than on the manner of saying it. Now that she is changing her field of labor somewhat, – writing sketches of travel and novels instead of those stories for children and young people on which her fame is mainly formed, – it is proper that serious criticism should be made upon what she is doing, with the hope that it may prove to be of some service to her as well as to her readers. A novel is a very difficult thing, and the really good novels are not many. A passable story, suited to the active fancy of childhood, requires more common gifts and a less profound and varied experience of life; it admits also of much latitude, and the writer is not held to any very strict rules of art. But a good novel must be a
work of art. It must have well defined characters, a well-constructed plot, much dramatic power, plenty of incident, and in addition, as much humor, pathos[,] ideality, imagination, wit, fancy, wisdom of experience and exact information as the author can supply. To furnish all this taxes the powers of the greatest writers, – and yet, without all this the novel will appear to be wanting in some of those elements which make it attractive or even readable . . . And the greatest richness and fertility of resource in some directions may be spoiled by the lack of just that savoring which salt gives to soup. Hence there are few novels really perfect or so near it as to give a high sense of pleasure, while there are very many that have some great qualities and please us up to the limit of their excellence.

Miss Alcott’s Work, A Story of Experience, is not one of the few perfect novels, nor does it stand in the first or the second rank among novels. It has remarkable merits, and a great many of them, but it also has certain very grave defects, and it fails to produce, on the whole, the impression that the author obviously intended to make. The heroine, Christie Devon, interests the reader, and so do most of the other characters, but the hero does not. At least he fails to interest his own sex, for it may be that women see much to admire in a good, moral, patriotic young man, largely equipped with the domestic virtues – such as David Sterling is. Our complaint about him is that he does not know how to love, and never can have experienced that passion in the masculine form. And as love is the essential ingredient of nine novels in every ten, and a hero who is also a lover is almost indispensable, it is a sad blemish in this book to find David so well disposed to be a lover, but not knowing how. His virtues do not have that effect upon us they should, we are so dissatisfied with his cool and Quakerish way of making love. It must be said, however, that love-making is but a small part of the book, which takes us through a great many experiences of life in New England. Its title, “Work,” perhaps is meant to indicate that labor and adventure are its main features, and that the pastime of love has but a little place in it.

Viewed from this side, or indeed, from any point in which the love of humanity, the bearing of one another’s burdens, and the general good of mankind are brought to the foreground, Miss Alcott’s work deserves high praise. Its spirit is wholesome and kindly, its teachings sound and attractive, its illustrations of character are striking and memorable. If wit and good sense, a lively fancy and a generous heart, and a strong, innate and imbred [inbred] desire to make the world better than it is, were alone sufficient to make a first-rate novelist, then Miss Alcott’s would take that rank without dispute. The outline of the story may be briefly told, without so much detail as to take away from our readers the pleasure of following its incidents for themselves, as many of them already have done, no doubt, in the columns of the Christian Union. The heroine, Christie, is much more important than any of the other personages, and her character is drawn with distinctness. She is resolute, capable, self-reliant, not much exposed to temptation, but rather a leader than a follower. In her whole career she never once runs the risk that the heroines of the old-fashioned English novels were always incurring; her heart and her reputation are usually safe, and her distresses come because she cannot carry out completely her plan of life for the time being. In other words, she is less feminine, without being more masculine, than the ordinary heroine. She is poor, and not without pride, and she cannot endure the seclusion and commonplace cares of a New England country life; she therefore comes to Boston, leaving her uncle and aunt, who have brought her
up since the death of her parents, and be-
gins to make her own way in the world.
At first she goes out to service in a gen-
teele Boston family (very well described;) then losing her place she becomes an ac-
tress at a respectable theater, under the en-
couragement of a grave and elderly star actor named Kent, who somehow sug-
gests Warren at the museum; then, after attaining a reasonable success in that art, she gives it up for moral reasons, and be-
takes herself to dress-making, after having passed through the intermediate stages of the governess and of companion to an in-
sane young lady, who commits suicide. As a seamstress in the high-toned Boston es-

tablishment of Mrs King, she makes the ac-
quaintance of another seamstress, Rachel, who has had an unfortunate history, be-
comes her champion and loses her place in con-
sequence. Then she takes in sewing, overworks herself, gets poorly paid, and ends this chapter of her life by a melan-
choly period in which she attempts suicide, being saved from death by Rachel, whom she had befriended. Rachel introduces her to Mrs Wilkins, a laundress and one of the best characters in the book, who, in turn, introduces her to her minister, Mr Power. This is no other than Theodore Parker, whose relation to his Boston parish, and to all persons in need of sympathy and aid, is very well set forth in the chapters that fol-
low. Mr Power sends her to the quiet home of a Quakeress, whose son is a gardener, where she does house-work and garden-
ing, and falls in love with David, the son. She had already, as governess, rejected the suit of her mistress’s brother, Mr Philip Fletcher, a Boston gentleman of indolent and invalid habits, but manly at heart, who afterward reappears as a colonel in the Union army. She marries David after a long and rather puzzling period of courtship, in which David does not figure to so much advantage as Miss Alcott meant, we fear, and when married she goes to the army as a hospital nurse, while David, who had en-
tered before as a private, goes with his reg-
iment. He dies of a wound, and is nursed by Christie in his last days; afterward, with her baby, she lives in David’s home and manages his garden, until by the death of “Uncle Enos” she becomes an heiress in a small way, and is able to devote herself to philanthropy in a wider field, where the story leaves her. For this new work we are told that Christie is specially fitted, – it consists in bringing together the women of work and the women of culture, between whom Christie acts as an interpreter. As a brief statement of one of Miss Alcott’s ideas, of which something is seen in all her books, take this passage about Christie from the last chapter: –

From the gentleman, her father, she had inherited the fine instincts, gra-
cious manners and unblemished name of an old and honorable race; from the farmer’s daughter, her mother, came the equally valuable dower of practical virtues, a sturdy love of independence, and great respect for the skill and courage that can win it. [3 sentences omitted.] “I owe all I can do; for in la-
bor, and the efforts and the experiences that grow out of it, I have found in-
dependence, education, happiness and religion.”

The details of the story are more inter-
esting than the plot, which is an unusual one, as has been seen, and gives room for a great deal of incident and of the exhibition of character. It is not an absorbing story, however; we are not thrilled with anxiety for the dangers, or filled with sympathy for the woes, of the heroine; she soon con-
vinces us that she can take care of herself and of others, if need be, and we look for-
ward with a serene confidence to see her come out all right. This forecast of the fu-
ture makes the story a little tame at times; nor is it always relieved by such humorous
scenes as those in which Cynthia Wilkins figures. It is also to be noticed that the peculiar optimism which characterizes Miss Alcott prevents her novel from being so tragic or searching as it might otherwise become; she will not permit her creatures to sin or suffer beyond a certain point, and there is always balm in Gilead for them, whatever they do. This is a pleasing trait, and will not make her books less popular; but it interferes a little with grand success in fiction:

"Out of wo and out of crime,
Draws the heart a love sublime."

is a good maxim in imaginative writing, however bad it may be in morals, and whatever Mr Emerson’s Saadi may have thought of it. Wholesome and kindly as Miss Alcott is, and never more so than in this novel, she does not go deep enough; she deals with the surface of things too much, and fails of producing that profound impression that is received from the best works of imagination. Yet “Work” shows a marked progress in this respect, as well as in style and general interest, over her novel of eight years ago – “Moods.” It is published by Roberts, this week, having been somewhat delayed by the large advance orders received, which already amount to 15,000.

Springfield Daily Union
(12 June 1873): 2:3.

Like Miss Alcott’s other novels it is written chiefly about women and with the purpose of describing their trials, their duties, and their possibilities, under the conditions of modern American life. As the title implies, this novel is a plea for independence for woman through work, instead of the traditional life of dependence upon fathers and brothers. “Christie,” the heroine, is, in the words of the author, “one of that large class of women who, moderately endowed with talents, earnest, true-hearted, are driven by necessity, temperament or principle, out into the world to find support, happiness and homes for themselves.” “Christie” is, in turn, servant, actress, governess, companion, seamstress and various other things. At last she marries, but loses her husband after a few years service in the army, and takes to the platform to preach the gospel of work for women. A tone of deep religious and humanitarian sentiment runs through the volume, and many pearls of wisdom and tenderly wise sayings are dropped by the wayside. But while anything that Miss Alcott writes cannot help being good, we are constrained to say that this novel scarcely equals our expectation. In an artistic point of view the tale is rambling, disjointed, and stops at no particular place. One almost feels as if the author must have written it by pieces, as the serial installments were called for. As a contribution to the practical solution of the difficulties connected with women’s work, it is of very trifling value. The heroine, in fact, have passed through an entirely different class of experiences just as well, for all the practical hints and hopeful suggestions her life affords to other women workers. In this respect it contrasts unfavorably with Mrs Whitney’s recent book, “The Other Girls,” which treats the same subject. “Christie” works, to be sure, but not to much effect, for she soon flats out in a pitiable manner and concludes to drown herself, a sort of thing there’s not the least need of any American girl’s doing. On the whole, “Christie’s” experience scarcely affords encouragement to other girls to go and do likewise, while it is calculated to lend an argument to those old-fashioned people who obstinately
maintain that women were never meant for the hard uses of this hard world, but can only thrive in just that state of dependence and protection which Miss Alcott repudiates.

**The Commonwealth**

Miss Alcott’s *Work* is another of the volumes which attest the large observation, wholesome teachings, elevating purpose, and generous nature, of the popular author, and, like all that have preceded it, will throw a sweet, uplifting and refining influence around the circle in which it may penetrate. It is of a wider and more ambitious range than her previous works – possibly excepting “Moods” – and shows that her flight has not failed for want of strength of wing nor objective point. Introduced to a multitude of readers in the *Christian Union* newspaper, it will double and treble its constituency, let us hope, during the long days of summer, and thenceforward be a perpetual enjoyment in recollection. Twenty-seven gems of illustrations, from drawings by Eytinge, add quality to the pleasure of a perusal of the work.

“One of the fairest names in the galaxy of our women authors is Louisa M. Alcott. She commenced writing when quite young, and very early attracted attention by a certain freshness of spirit and sincerity of character which appeared in all her work, and made even her lighter sketches more sufficing and magnetic than the better finished and more pretentious works of most other authors. Her “Moods,” published several years ago, hinted abilities that had never found full expression, and a higher and finer quality of mind and character than those of most bookwrights. But it lacked artistic proportion and finish, and did little more than suggest a possibility. She seemed herself aware of her literary defects, and set diligently to work to overcome them in a severe training-school, writing books for children and the young. Her “Little Women,” “Little Men,” and “An Old-Fashioned Girl,” written out of a rich experience and laden with the lore of the heart, were so cleverly done, and so honest and life-like withal, that they struck directly into the current of popular interest and were carried through a score of editions. They were so true to the life of New England and held the mirror so fairly before the face of Young America that we are not surprised that they were regarded as typically American by English critics, and received with the highest praise. Their English popularity is almost remarkable, considering the materials they are composed of, and the disposition to push such ventures from American authors aside as of no account. It was because the books were more than clever, because they came out of an honest purpose to deal truly and kindly with all the world, because they showed an instinct deeper and truer than any literary art or disciplined skill and cunning, that they made such a favorable impression abroad as well as here.

These were works for young readers. But whoever read them felt that Miss Alcott had abilities and experiences which
fitted her for success in a higher department of literature. She has ventured into the field, and “Work” is the result. It has all her characteristics, and is incomparably superior to her early work in every respect but one – that was covered all over with the sweet dew of early morning; this has the mid-summer flower, but the leaf is dry as at noon-day. The plot of the story shows more ingenuity than imagination. Indeed, it is rather tame. It has very few dramatic situations and no catastrophe. Rather, it is all catastrophe. It is the story of the life of a New England girl, strong-willed, impulsive, eager, active, restless, yet true as steel, womanly, independent, with instincts wiser than her intellect and a heart she could trust when her head failed. Christy Devon was an orphan, brought up by her Uncle Enos and Aunt Betsey. She tired of his hard, money-getting ways, and was hurt by his penurious spirit and perpetual repression. Moreover, she had a big beau that she disliked the more the more her uncle urged her to marry him. She determined to quit the house that had ceased to be a home, and seek a fortune in the city. She packed her slender wardrobe into her trunk and filled the vacant places with splendid projects and dreams as fragile as they were fair. She had taught school and had read good books, but at last was glad to take a place as servant in a shabby genteel family, where her sole companion was a poor colored woman. This lasted for a year, until she was tired of it, and one night fell asleep while reading in bed, and the candle set the clothes on fire. Then she was dismissed, and presently found a place in a theatre, just large enough to set her foot into, but which grew until she obtained a highly respectable position, and bid fair to be a star. But her heart rebelled at the life, and after an accident she turned away from the stage, and secured a place as governess in the family of a weak, fashionable widow, whose rich, idle brother, who had run through most of the indulgences, and was in quest of a new adventure, fell in love with her, and offered himself. Her fancy was pleased, but her heart rebelled and she threw up the situation, to drop at length into an attendant upon an invalid girl who inherited insanity, and at last killed herself with a penknife. Then she found a situation as a seamstress, but lost it because she befriended an unfortunate girl, and refused to stay when work was denied her. She struggled bravely with her needle for awhile, but was taken ill, got behind with her landlady, could not get pay for work, and was rescued from suicide by Rachel, whom she had upheld, and who took her to Mrs. Wilkins, “the clear starcher,” the most original and striking character in the whole gallery of portraits. Here she recovers her health and human nature, and is helped by Mrs. Wilkins’s minister, who is none other than Theodore Parker. He sends her to a Quaker lady living just out of town, whose son was a florist, and in whose garden the best sentiments of her nature took root and its finest qualities began to flower. The quiet ways and loving spirit of Mrs. Sterling were a constant comfort and invitation to her, and, presently, she loved David in spite of herself, and told him so in all the delicate, mute, expressive ways women are masters of. But David’s affection is all kindness of heart – that mute glow of the soul that warms like the fire in the black stove, but never enlightens any one as to its condition. He is the most provoking sort of lover, jealous, miserable, and keeping Christie in a sort of torment, and yet saying never a word. She can endure it no longer, and gets the great-hearted minister to open a door for her retreat. Her old lover comes back, well, improved, and refined, and offers himself again, and is again refused by the heart, though the offer tempted her pride and calculation. Presently David manages to
stammer what he could not plainly de-
clare, and ask what he had only to take
for the asking. Soon as they were mar-
rried, David went to the war as captain
and Christie as nurse – he to die and she
to nurse her former lover and save his
life, and go home a widow to become a
mother, and finally inherit the fine estate
of her old uncle, and become an active
philanthropist.

So much for the tale. It is full of incident
and adventure, skilfully told, with delicate
and fine touches here and there, and much
excellent characterization. David Sterling,
the hero of the story, is gentle as a dove,
and gracious and sweet as his own violets,
but, on the whole, deficient in manliness
and considerable of a failure. Probably
Miss Alcott does not admire him entirely.
Christie is admirably drawn, as a whole,
but she does not grow. She seems quite as
wise and ripe and bright at twenty as at
the end of her experience. She grows on
the reader, however, and that is the main
thing, and is one of the characters we are
glad to have known and shall rejoice to re-
member. The story is full of interest, catch-
ing one up every moment by new incidents
and adventures. It introduces us to a whole
population. It is thoroughly moral, gener-
ous, and fine-toned. But it is deficient in
power, both in sentiment and as a work
of art. It plays around the deep places and
over the most thrilling experiences of hu-
man life, but fails to sound their depths
and develop their meaning in actual situ-
ations. Its delineation of love in every in-
cidence is pale and lifeless, and excites the
suspicion that its author has never known
what it is, either as a passion or an inspi-
ration, an agony or a rapture. It will be
popular with the majority of readers for
its variety of fresh incidents, its charm-
ing style, its happy characterization, its
kindly spirit, and above all as the fairest
blossom of a truly beautiful and gifted
nature.

The Ladies’ Repository
[Boston] 50.[1] (July
1873): 73–74.

Christie’s Experiment, having tried itself in
the Christian Union, has now grown into a
book. It does not strike us as a remarkably
brilliant experiment, this of being jack at
all trades and not specially good at any.
It is rather a dreary tale, after all, how-
ever true to life it may be, this experience
of Christie’s as housemaid, actress, gov-
erness, companion, seamstress of high and
low degree, so low at last that it comes al-
most to starvation and suicide, — then laun-
dress and housemaid again, and so up the
ascending ladder of alms-dispenser, nurse,
baby-tender, and at last platform lecturer.
All this is work, and good work, to be sure,
but the underlying idea evidently is that a
woman’s work is to have no outlook be-
yond the present hour; that she is to be
a helper at the first thing her hands find
do, high or low, and so wait and drift
and worry along, till she finds her “des-
tiny.” And this is not only the idea of Miss
Alcott’s books but of Mrs Whitney’s, and
many others written about girls and for
girls. With this idea we venture to take is-
sue, and submit that it would have been
vastly better for Christie to have had one
good trade and followed it through the
entire ten years before David appeared;
and for that matter, for the long life af-
terward, since life with David was so brief
an idyl, followed by that sad taking up of
the burden of life again, from whose pos-
sibility no woman is exempt. The lack of
a steady purpose, a definite aim, was the
weak element in Christie’s experience. And
it carries its moral with it; the same moral
that poor Richard found out so long ago,
that a rolling stone gathers no moss. These
homely and hard old truths seem to have no variation for the feminine.

That we are not in full sympathy with Christie’s work does not prevent us, however, from the enjoyment of its portrayal at the hands of Miss Alcott. The same sharp, incisive mind, the same keen relish of incidents and “situations,” the same humor for the ludicrous is at work here as in her previous volumes. But it hardly comes up to full tide. Indeed we doubt of [if] it will ever reach again the high water mark of “Little Women.” This story suffers from the desultory method of its composition. Each newspaper section strives for a certain completeness and dramatic rounding, and so it becomes not so much a continued story as a series of episodes. We suspect that the destiny that shaped poor Christie’s ends after their dramatic and harrowing fashion, was the Cerberus of a printer clamoring for his weekly sop of the interesting and dramatic. But if, as rumor has it, the lucky author received the comfortable sum of three thousand dollars, or even a third of it, for this use of her story in its chrysalis state, she is fairly well compensated for some damage done to it. It may be questionable whether Miss Alcott is not writing too much for the advantage of her literary fame. But of the pecuniary benefits that flow from following well a single trade she furnishes a shining illustration, which may well be held up as a practical offset to Christie’s policy.

The earnest tone which pervades Miss Alcott’s new story, and the happy glimpses it affords of home-life, pleasantly remind the reader of “Little Women.” Miss Alcott’s style, though far from careful, is vivacious, and peculiarly her own. Her ready sympathies, and her bright, sensible way of looking at life, make her a favorite with the young people; and children of an older growth read her books with enjoyment and profit. “Work” will be welcomed by both young and old; and Christie’s adventures will be followed to the end with undiminished zest.

In the story before us there is a grateful absence of the current slang-phrases which have sometimes disfigured this sprightly writer’s book. Do our young people willfully ignore the beauty of refined language? Then let the imaginary characters, which exert so large an influence on their own, ignore slang; for the aim of story-writers should be not only to give their pictures of life that touch of Nature which makes the whole world kin, but to present a higher ideal. “Fiction has no business to exist,” says Joubert, “unless it is more beautiful than reality.”

Our story relates the fortunes of a young girl, who, at the early age of twenty-one, leaves an uncongenial home, and, sustained by a brave heart and high hopes, goes alone into the world to achieve independence. Christie’s career is fitful and varied. She begins her new life as a housemaid; but her ambitious spirit does not allow her to remain long in this position. She turns from one field of labor to another with restless activity, and adapts herself to new duties and strange companions with marvellous success. Thus at one time we see her on the stage, winning applause and favor as an actress. Now she appears as a governess, now as companion to an invalid, again as a seamstress. Through faithfulness to a fallen friend, she loses a good position; and when, poor and forsaken herself, she drifts to despair, a grateful hand snatches her back to life and hope. Christie finds lovers as well as friends in
her changeful experiences; and we leave her in the midst of her usefulness, a noble, happy woman. But we have no intention of sketching the plot for the benefit of those readers who begin a story at the end.

In the course of her experience Christie naturally falls in with all sorts of people; but the mixture of the practical and romantic seems a little incongruous at times. This strikes us especially as we read of the Carrol family, over whose luxurious home a mysterious shadow hangs. Christie's presence in this doomed home lightens the atmosphere a little, but does not avert the tragedy which ends her labors as companion. The whole scene has a morbid tinge, and savors of the melodramatic.

Yet this sad picture serves to bring into strong relief the portrait of C. Wilkins, clear-starcher, with her six rollicking urchins. The shrewd, bustling, honest-souled woman bursts upon us like a fresh Nor'-wester, and blows away all lurking miasmas. She is the most original character of the book. One of the most amusing scenes in which she figures is where her patriotic ardor finally triumphs over dull inertia, and her reluctant 'Lisha dons a soldier's garb.

Miss Alcott endeavors, in this "Story of Experience," to illustrate the beauty and need of labor, and to inculcate the grand truth, that wholesome work is the salvation of many souls. In Miss Alcott's creed there is no repulsive sentimentalism. The divine communion, the trust in God for which Christie yearned and despaired of, and only gained after years of patient devotion to duty, is the true religion. It does not come to all alike; but many will seek and find it only as Christie did. Robert Falconer, in Macdonald's story, first teaches the neglected souls he is striving to uplift to help themselves.

This story contains a beautiful lesson of our mutual dependence on each other, and the duty of helpfulness. It is good to read of the Great-hearts who do not live to themselves alone, and who are never too busy to "lend a hand." Better still is the knowledge that such men and women live not only in good books, but that willing hands are to-day outstretched in this working-day world to strengthen the weak and the doubting by their cordial grasp.

We trust that all who read "Work" may find it in their hearts to say Amen to the closing words: "The greatest of God's gifts to us is the privilege of sharing his great work."

"Work." The Literary World 4.2 (1 July 1873): 18–19.

We find it really difficult to subdue our voice to the proper critical tone, in speaking of Miss Alcott's last volume. "Work" is a story which leaves upon the mind a very warm and vivid impression. It is earnest, animated, highly dramatic, and in parts exceedingly, although never weakly, tender. The characters are life-like and varied; there is a genuine plot, – pretty if not profound. The purpose of the book is healthful and noble, and so thoroughly infused, or wrought into the story, and so quietly enforced by the easy development of the latter, that it will come very near doing positive good. The dialogue is better than Miss Alcott's best, hitherto. And we mean this for very high praise.

Of the style we would speak more at length. It has been matter of keen, and sometimes impatient regret to many of us, that a writer of Miss Alcott's vivacity and power should have been so careless heretofore in the use of a very fine instrument of expression. Inaccuracies, exaggerations, mannerisms, nay, even vulgarisms have defaced many a page bright
with quick thought and honorable feeling, and even abounding in verbal felicities. Suggestions like the above have been made with more or less mildness by the lady’s formal critics, and all apparently disregarded. Miss Alcott seemed content with the sure applause of the young, for whom she professedly wrote, and who, after all, could show that she was not right? But in “Work,” the improvement is suddenly made. Either admonition has taken a late effect, or the transparent earnestness of the author in enforcing her fine moral, has given her an unconscious dignity. “Work” shows all the gain in the matter of style we ever expected to see; and it is, in the main, a very well-written book. The ungrammatical characters may be thought by purists too numerous and voluble, but there is bad grammar and bad grammar, and that of “Work” is, in some sort, first-rate. It is pungent and genuine, and some of good Mrs. Wilkins’s speeches remind one of the Biglow Papers, and will not only be received with rapture abroad, – where they hate to think that we ever use good English, – but sound natural and funny at home. For instance, – Christie, the heroine, to whom homely Mrs. Wilkins came with help and cheer at the darkest hour of her destiny, has said that it is good to find one is not one too many in the world after all, – and that kind creature replies:

“Don’t you never feel that agin my dear.” [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

Better still, and quite inimitable in its way, is the passage describing Mrs. Wilkins’s endeavors to induce her small husband to enlist in the volunteer army of the last decade.

This episode overflows with very delightful humor, which never seems forced. Passages abound like that in which the irate, but not wholly unfeeling head-dressmaker, is represented as “hurriedly stab-
womanhood is celebrated in both, vehemently by the woman, chivalrously by the man. Mrs. Whitney, too, in her last book, and in others, has said many tender and persuasive words on the same side of the same question, but Mrs. Whitney is so entirely and inevitably ideal, that she inspires less faith than her more vigorous sister, and the warm, pale pink with which she perpetually suffuses men and things, is at times just a trifle wearisome.

We make room for one more extract from “Work,” a sketch, the fun of which does not impair its perfect faithfulness, and which will be keenly relished by many who have assisted at gatherings like the one described:

“A few evenings before she had gone to one of the many meetings for working-women, which had made some stir of late.” [Remainder of 6 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

How glorious an appearance the heroine put in at this juncture, with much else equally good, let every one read for himself in the pages of “Work.”

The Bookseller no. 188 (2 July 1873): 558–59.

Crowded with absurdities, incongruities, and inconsequent incidents, this novel is, nevertheless, most delightful reading. Christie, the heroine, living a slow, unexciting life in the house of her uncle, an old-fashioned farmer, determines to go out into the world and seek her fortune: to be independent, in fact, and to make or mar her own career. She leaves the New England farm, and making her way into the Great City, begins her experiences as a domestic “help” to a fashionable couple. Here she finds scope for her energies in teaching a poor black cook to read and write; but she soon longs for a wider sphere of action, and goes on the stage. In the difficult profession of an actress she achieves such success as to earn a salary of £5 a week in her second season! and, of course, to fill her companions with envy and jealousy. But, in time, she tires of the stage, and leaves it for a situation as nursery governess; with a much smaller income, we presume. From “teaching the young idea how to shoot,” she successively becomes a companion to a lady, seamstress, lecturer, and finally – the ultimate fate of all superior women – the happy wife of a distinguished man! It is not, however, for its incidents, that “Work” will be admired, but for the bright glimpses it affords of domestic life in the United States. In English novels we inevitably meet a peer, or at least a baronet, and invariably get the notion that their authors are familiar with the very best society: in American fiction, on the contrary, the most noticeable people are vulgarians trying to get rich, philanthropists never wearied of doing good, and colonels and captains emulating the manners of the highest European aristocracy. All these Miss Alcott describes at full length, and with not a little pleasant sarcasm. Especially when a “belle of the season” appears in the story, does the American novelist shine as a satirist. Then, as in Mr. Butler’s poem of “Nothing to wear,” we get a complete catalogue of the lady’s shortcomings, – her time spent in dressing, driving, and dining; in skimming novels, embroidering muslins, and going to ball, rout, or church, to display her finery; and when she marries, we see how she snubs her husband, and neglects her children, – those “inconvenient blessings” which American women “love with the love of a shallow heart;” “taking such good care of their little bodies that there is none left for their little souls;” while the
husbands, having tried all sorts of pleas-
sures, find that “life, like their newspa-
paper, has nothing in it,” and at last “pay
the penalty for that unsatisfactory knowl-
gedge.” It would be easy to fill a page or
two with pithy extracts of this kind; much
easier, indeed, than to tell in a brief para-
graph what are the main characteristics of
this latest and most popular of Transat-
lantic fictions. Suffice it, then, to say that in
“Work” there is a higher and more refined
element: and though much space is de-
voted to the fashionable life of New York,
the main purpose of this novel is to show
that women’s work need not necessarily,
or in any material degree, infringe upon or
clash with the hardly less important duties
and occupations of men. And for saying
this boldly, the author deserves the thanks
of all thoughtful people, whether men or
women. The American edition is got up
in the neat style for which the house of
Roberts Brothers is so famous. The illus-
trations by Sol. Eytinge are capital. Un-
like many of his English brother-artists, he
had evidently read the book and studied
the characters before he pictured their
faces. Consequently they each and all
have an individuality of their own.
The English edition, published, we be-
lieve, simultaneously, is without the
illustrations.

The Christian [word
missing] (3 July 1873).
Clippings File.

Usually, we are able to say of Miss Alcott’s
books that they are thoroughly breezy and
healthful; but we are unable to give the
same unqualified commendation to the
volume before us. It is at once whole-
some and morbid, refreshing and depress-
ing. With much that is excellent, it also
combines much that is noxious, and in-
stead of being the invigorating tonic which
we have found her former productions to
be, it is often a stimulant which is followed
by a dejecting reaction. Had Miss Alcott
been careful to preserve her character as
an unexceptionable mentor of the young –
especially those of her own sex – there are
considerable portions of this book which
should never have been written; and we
fear that, coming from one ordinarily so
trustworthy, they will exert an unwhole-
some contagious influence upon the minds
of her impressionable and sensitively senti-
mental readers. We are deterred from giv-
ing extracts, illustrating and defending the
truthfulness of our criticism in these par-
ticulars, lest we should incur the same mis-
take and give currency to the same falla-
cious teachings which we censure in Miss
Alcott.

Apart from this serious defect, which,
it is just to repeat, mars portions only
of the volume, it exhibits the straightforwardness and the remarkable felicity of
characterization which distinguish all of
Miss Alcott’s productions. Many of its
descriptions and portraiture are exquis-
itely fresh and natural, and nearly every
page sparkles with good-humor, common-
sense, and practical wisdom.

The story told by Miss Alcott is of a
brave and high-spirited girl who made up
her mind to “take care of herself” and no
longer be a burden to her friends; who was
not afraid of work, however humble, and
was equally sensible in other respects; and
whose experiences revealed where she was
weak and where strong, thus fitting her, by
vicissitudes of pain and disappointment, to
play well her part in the drama of life. To
our judgment, the effect of her experiences
is not the most elevating – she becomes
too sharp, too calculating, too much of
the Yankee, and there is an unpleasant
undertone of selfishness in all her best performances. Besides, the story is very unequal, and the characters in it are delineated with fluctuating power. The first fifty pages are in Miss Alcott’s best vein; and her paintings within this brief compass – of good “Aunt Betsey,” of sour but genuine “Uncle Enos,” of “Mrs. Flint, a dreary woman, with ‘boarders’ written all over her sour face and faded figure,” and of Mrs. Stuart, who aspires to be a “queen of society,” but who suggests visions of “Zenobia, troubled about fish-sauce, or Aspasia, indignant at the price of eggs” find no counterpart in the rest of the volume. It is evident that Miss Alcott expended her force upon these first fifty pages, and that thereafter the story ceased to be a labor of love. On the other hand, its vivacity, except in occasional scintillations, fades out of it, and a tendency to tediousness and exaggeration takes its place. But notwithstanding this, there are numerous passages throughout the volume which are very beautiful, very instructive, and abounding in the delicate discriminations of character for which Miss Alcott is remarkable, and which make her writings so delightful. She succeeds better as a moralist and humorist than as a writer of novels or tales.


In spite of its improbabilities, and the way in which its author has somewhat overdone what was originally a sufficiently well-conceived plot, Miss Louisa Alcott’s “Work” is on the whole a good book, and a pleasing one. Its character has already been so thoroughly described, so turned about and analyzed by the daily press, and its publication was heralded so long in advance by announcements and letters from Boston, that whatever one may say in the way of recapitulating the contents of the volume is sure to have been fore stalled. To confine ourselves to our own impressions of the book, it seems to us that it wins its place not by means of, but rather in spite of, its story. Beginning with a somewhat ostentatious and inartistic indication of what its moral – the commonest of life’s morals – is to be, it proceeds to point that moral by a series of adventures and vicissitudes in the existence of its heroine. These are so improbable in their succession, so detached (for they are connected only by what we must call inexplicable jumps), and so without bearing upon one another, that if it were not for the brilliancy and vivacity shown in their several separate descriptions, they would be utterly destroyed by their almost ludicrous positions in the whole novel, and by the constant non sequitur which the reader is always on the point of uttering in protest. “Work” is a mosaic of good things, badly put together; and Miss Alcott, with her brain teeming with illustrations of the theory she has so earnestly advocated, should have remembered the good old legal rule, that it is not the multitude, but the clearness of the proofs, that convinces.

Boston Courier 49.27 (6 July 1873): 1:3.

Miss Alcott’s last book, though hardly so fresh and original in its interest as her earlier successes, is nevertheless a capital story, and a wholesome one as well. The heroine, Christie Devon, is a poor orphan
girl who, at the age of twenty-one, becoming discontented with the drudgery of her life on the farm of her close-fisted Uncle Enos, determines to break away from a comfortable but disagreeable dependence, and try her fortune in the city. She tries first to obtain a situation as governess, but her lack of accomplishments rendered her unfit for the service she sought in the eyes of mothers who wished their darlings to learn French before English, music before grammar, and drawing before writing. But she knew how to do housework, and she put her pride in her pocket, and found employment as second girl in a family where her duties were neither hard nor distasteful, and where she remained a year. She was finally discharged for setting fire to the curtains while reading in bed, and while waiting for another situation she met at her boarding-house a young actress and her mother, and by them was induced to try the stage. She succeeded so well in this vocation that at the end of three years she found herself in the position of the first soubrette of a popular company, but by this time she found herself growing fond of excitement and applause, and anxious to win admiration at the expense of everything else. So she bravely relinquished a career that promised great pecuniary rewards, and again sought employment as a governess. Christie was this time successful, but a somewhat blase uncle of the children she was engaged to teach, fell in love with her in a sort of patronizing way, and all he proposed was promptly rejected. She was naturally constrained once more to change her work. For a time she attended an invalid and then she entered a mantua-maker’s establishment, where she met and befriended a girl who had made the slip that commonly proves fatal, and who but for Christie’s kindness would have followed the course usually taken by like unfortunates. Again she was driven to seek new employment (for her virtuous companions refused to associate with the friend of poor Rachel, and her discharge was forced upon the mantua-maker), and a kind-hearted clergyman finally found for her a pleasant home in the country, with a Quaker lady named Stirling and her son. David Stirling and Christie grew to love each other, and were married just at the breaking out of the war, into which the husband entered as a soldier and the wife as a nurse; for two years they labored in the field and the hospital, and then David wa [was] killed. Once more dark days came to the brave girl, but soon little Ruth was born, and close-fisted Uncle Enos, now nearing the end of his life, asked his long-neglected niece to come to the old farmhouse and “stop a spell.” She went, and before long the old man died, leaving her quite a little fortune; but she settled most of it on her little child and her dead husband’s mother and sister, and bearing in mind David’s dying words, “Don’t mourn, dear heart, but work,” she lived on to a happy and useful middle-life, where the book leaves her and her fortunes. This outline of the story will give the reader a good idea of its character without in the least detracting from the pleasure of perusal. As might be imagined the rollicking fun of the author’s earlier volumes gives place in Work to a soberer and more serious vein; but we are never bored by sermons, and in the pages which relate to the Wilkins family there are some of Miss Alcott’s best humorous writing. It may add to the interest of the book in the estimation of some readers to know that many, if not most, of its characters are sketched from life; Theodore Parker was the original of Mr. Power, the minister, and in the concluding chapters we fancy that we get a glimpse of Mrs. Julia Ward Howe and Mrs. Livermore. The illustrations by Sol Eytinge are generally excellent and really aid the author in placing her characters before the reader.
The extraordinary popularity of Miss Alcott’s previous works, “Little Women,” “Little Men,” etc. is the best indication of her attractiveness as a writer. This latest of her books, has with the exception of “Moods” more nearly the character of a novel, than any other, and while there is not great intensity or power, the book has all of those bright, we had almost said inspiring qualities which have rendered her so fascinating. The story is a sensible, straightforward one, and affords the author opportunities for the production of these sweet bits of character, charming descriptions, and bright, graceful passages, which win ever the hearts of her readers. The story will be warmly commended and is sure to be liked; the heroine, Christie, starts out from a home that has become unpleasant to her, to encounter life in Boston. She undertakes house service at first, but proves to be not fitted for it – at least, in the estimation of her mistress, with whom most housekeepers will be likely to agree. She next attempts the career of an actress. Miss Alcott herself has had some experience on the amateur stage, and pictures to us Christie in one of her own favorite parts. Christie makes a friend of an actor of the old school, who must be Warren, if he is anybody. She abandons the stage because its life is not consistent with her ideas of the best development of character. Then she becomes a companion, a governess, a dressmaker, a seamstress, passing through varied fortunes, which are very vividly and very naturally described. At the time her lowest estate is reached, she is introduced by a friend to the Rev. Mr. Power, in whom no one can fail to recognize the portrait of Miss Alcott’s early friend and adviser, Theodore Parker. Christie finds her husband in a gardener, to whose mother she is sent to do housework by Mr. Power. She marries this youth in humble life, after having previously rejected a more eligible match in social position. She follows her husband to the army as a hospital nurse, and attends him on his death-bed, to which a wound has brought him. She returns a widow, to find herself shortly after in possession of a modest competence, which the story leaves her bestowing upon the needy. “Work” is one of Miss Alcott’s best productions, and is one of the most timely of the season.


This story, which has for some months been one of the most attractive features of the Christian Union, now comes from Roberts Brothers in a handsome duodecimo of 450 pages. Those who had any fears that the author would not sustain, in higher flights, the reputation gained by her delightful “Little Women” series, and other juveniles, will here find themselves happily disappointed. “Work” shows her abilities in a new direction, and is clearly an improvement upon any of her previous efforts.

Christie, the heroine, is a New England girl, who, wearying of the hum drum life she was leading as a dependent upon her uncle, all at once makes her “new declaration of independence,” and sets forth into the world to find what better work awaits her there. The story keeps closely
to her throughout, with but one little side-plot, and no other concealments, discoveries and surprises. She goes to the city, and takes lodgings with a Mrs. Flint, “a dreary woman with ‘boarders’ written all over her face and faded figure. [Additional sentence omitted.]” After many failures to obtain work as she desired, Christie bravely resolved to begin at the lowest round of the ladder, and climb by degrees. So she hires out as a servant, and keeps her place amid many tribulations till she earns her discharge by accidentally setting fire to the house. She next appears as an actress, in which character she bids fair to make an honest living, but after three years’ experience she concludes there is better work than that, and quits the stage. What next? A governess. In this capacity she continued but a few months, when again the scene shifts, and she is a “companion” to a young lady who has a predisposition to insanity. This chapter of her experience is one of the most painfully interesting in the volume, and gives intimation of the reserved power of the writer.

Christie’s next vocation is the very unromantic one of seamstress, and it is while following this that she has a fit of dear-me’s, and comes near drowning herself. She longs for a home and a husband, and begins to doubt if it would not have been better to have staid with her uncle, and to have married Joe, the farmer. But she is rescued from despair, and after further “experiences” finds herself again at work as housemaid and assistant to a florist. And – not to follow the narrative more closely, – she subsequently fills the positions of secretary, hospital nurse, and reformer.

The story is full of earnest purpose, and will be interpreted variously, according to each reader’s particular predilections. At first it seemed as if the author intended to show how a woman might support herself and lead a noble, honorable and happy life, without the inevitable resort to marriage. But this intention, unfortunately, is laid aside. Christie is unsuccessful and unhappy until she finds her man. Moreover she is always anxious that the man should appear. Upon a very slight acquaintance with Philip Fletcher, she expects him to offer himself, and decides in advance to accept him. In her loneliness as a seamstress she is sorry she had not married Joe. And scarcely has she heard David Sterling mentioned, when she begins to calculate the chances of a love affair. And afterwards when she fears she has lost him, and Philip again comes in her way, she is only kept from throwing herself into his arms by the homely but forcible advice of Mrs. Wilkins. What does all this mean? Evidently that “it is not good for (wo)man to be alone.” Not precisely the lesson which was to be expected by Miss Alcott, and which her own example and that of hundreds of other noble workers disprove. And moreover, the husbands who figure in this story do not impress one very favorably. Mr. Flint is “the incapable,” Mr. Stuart, “the hot-tempered and conceited,” Mr. Saltonstall, “a husband somewhere abroad, who so happily combined business with pleasure that he never found time to come home,” and Elisha Wilkins, – well, for his portrait, see page 170. But this seeming contradiction, and others, do not much hurt the effect of the book for most story-readers.

There are some passages equal to anything to be met within the master-pieces of fiction. For humor where is there anything better than the episode of Mrs. Wilkins and her six lively infants? That good soul is a study, and her hard sense as well as her dialect approves herself no distant relation of Hosea Biglow. “Jest let ’em remember,” says she, “that they take a husband for wuss as well as better (and there’s asight of wuss in this tryin’ world for some on us).” And to Christie, asking her receipt for cheerfulness she makes answer, “Rally
I don’t know, unless it’s jest doin’ whatever comes along, and doin’ of it hearty, sure that things is all right, though very often I don’t see it at fust.” And for pathos and tenderness what more touching than the scenes at the Carrolls, or that where David tells his sister’s story, or that – but why particularize, when each reader will have his or her own favorite portions. Mr. Power is the delineation of a noble Christian minister. If, as those say who profess to know, the original was Theodore Parker, and if this is a faithful picture, here is another instance of how much a good man may be belied in popular opinion based upon reports of his theological dogmas.

Miss Alcott has put much of herself into this book, and her friends will await with interest the coming novel upon which she is said to be engaged, and which is to be of still higher aim and purpose.

Excerpt from “Two American Tales.” The Athenaeum no. 2387 (26 July 1873): 111.

These two books [also The Other Girls] deal with the same topics: what women can do, what women may do, and what women ought to do. In both there are clever sketches of life and character under various aspects. The difficulties and obstacles that make working for a living so hard to women are described with truth and reality. Above all, there is plenty of wise and understanding sympathy with the temptations that specially beset the path of women, dazzling their eyes and wounding their hearts, until the right way seems to be even harder to find than to pursue. Although there is all this likeness between them, the story of ‘The Other Girls’ is far pleasanter . . .

‘Work: a Story of Experience,’ is full of good and excellent passages; but we miss the cheery energy there was in the ‘Old-Fashioned Girl,’ ‘Little Women,’ ‘Good Wives,’ and other works, too numerous to specify, for which we have to thank Miss Alcott. She uses her present heroine, Christie Devon, worse than ever the traditional step-mother in fairy-tales used the neglected child: – much worse; for she does not even leave her to be “happy ever after,” when her tasks are finished and the rightful Prince has come! Poor Christie Devon, after turning her hand to everything that a woman’s hand can find to do, and doing it heartily, though she is bruised, and battered, and all but beaten in her battle with the world, has just attained a comfortable haven, and married a good man whom she loves, when the authoress swoops down upon her once more, with “the uses of adversity,” and heaps upon her more sorrow, bent on distilling the very coldest, purest, and dreadfully precious elixir from it all. The reader feels that a little bit of happiness would have been much better for everybody, and much more like the real “Providence that shapes our ends.” The story of ‘Work’ is too restless; and the result is so fatiguing, that we should not be surprised if the reader, after finishing it, gives up, and refuses to do anything whatever for the rest of the day.

The Nation 17.422 (31 July 1873): 73.

Miss Alcott’s latest novel, ‘Work,’ is rather a more serious book than her ‘Little Men’ and ‘Little Women,’ which, as far as
bookselling was concerned, were very successful volumes. That this is a simple novel of amusement can hardly be pretended, or, if it is affirmed, it can be reasonably denied; it is rather a contribution to the literature of the “labor question” and the “woman question,” as they are called, which questions are the latest that it has become the fashion to treat under a veil of fiction. In general, however, it may be said that, unless the writer on these topics has better command of his art than is the case with most people who have practical ideas to advocate, he seldom does more than devise a combination of circumstances which fits just the particular case in point and no other; he is about as far from settling the general question as would be a man who should propose building a large separate asylum for every foundling orphan in a great city. It is never an easy task to convey amusement and instruction in the same breath; the best amusement is generally found in company with instruction in very general principles. A novel that is written to teach the young women of New England who become domestic servants cheerfully to blacken their master’s boots and to sit down to dinner with the colored cook, will probably be found to lack some of those qualities which arouse other feelings than a feeling of curiosity as to what may be said about a question which is generally discussed. A novel which is so totally devoid of imagination as ‘Work’ is nothing as a work of art; as a guide for poor girls, it is useless; for the invention of incidents is made so much more prominent than the treatment of character – character as modified and affected by external circumstances, which is what those concerned are most interested in – that it conveys no information that can be of any use in one case in a hundred. The following is a meagre outline of the story: The heroine, a young girl of twenty-one, makes her first attempt at supporting herself by entering the house of some vulgar people as a maid-of-all-work, although she is of a far higher nature than her master and mistress, as she shows, among other ways, by her lack of prejudice against color. She is devoted to literature, and sets the house on fire by reading in bed, for which she is most unjustly dismissed. Then she becomes an actress, afterwards a governess in a household where the flippant belles sneer at her, and a jaded man of fashion, the brother of the lady who employs her, a giddy worldling, falls in love with her and offers her his hand and much gold; she refuses him, however, and becomes the companion of a genteel maniac, who in time commits suicide by cutting his [her] throat. Nor should we forget that she is also employed as a sewing-girl and leaves that occupation because she stands up for the girl who has had a misfortune. In due course of time, she meets her fate, one David: they are married; he goes off to the late war of the Rebellion as an officer, and she goes as a nurse. He falls on the field of battle, leaving her to a lonely life. A posthumous daughter partly consoles her, and the rest of her days she devotes to good works. It is a book that was evidently inspired by excellent motives.

Arthur’s Illustrated Home Magazine 41.8 (August 1873): 545.

Miss Alcott has dared to touch that troublesome theme – What shall women do? – and has illumined it with the brightness of her own strong sense. The story is a pleasing one, and a suggestive one as well, and ought to be productive of many good results. It ought to encourage young girls
to “be up and doing with a heart for any fate,” instead of remaining idly at home, frittering away their time in frivolous, or at least, insignificant employments; or, perhaps, what is quite as bad, weakly lamenting that they are women, and consequently, are forbidden to do. It ought to teach those who have the charge of girls that they should not seek to fetter them down to a narrow field of endeavor if they show desires and capabilities for a wider sphere – that is, to punish them for their womanhood – for, energy suppressed and forbidden a right channel, will force its way into wrong ones. Miss Alcott has, in the writing of this book, done a good work for women.

Eclectic Magazine n.s. 18.2 (August 1873): 248.

There is some amiable gossip current in Boston to the effect that Miss Alcott is engaged on another novel, which will be her crowning achievement, and so far in advance of all she has previously done that she has expressed herself as regarding “Little Women” and “Work” as merely preliminary and unimportant. We shall be very glad if this prove true, and especially if she surpass herself to the extent indicated – perhaps we should then have that boon for which the generations have been waiting, “the great American novel;” but we must confess that since reading the present story we have our doubts, and are disposed to think that when Miss Alcott comes to lay aside her pen and sum up her labors, she will find that her greatest work is contained in the series of which “Little Women” was the key-note and beginning.

“Work” is a good book – healthful in tone, vivacious, interesting, and brimming over with the best intentions; but unless we admit that it is the function of the novel to paint life, not as it is but as it ought to be and as perhaps it some time will be, then “Work” is certainly not a novel. It is a tract which really throws a charm around that depressing species of literature, but it is no more “a story of experience” than Utopia is a sketch of existing social conditions. Notwithstanding the great diversity of events and incidents through which the heroine passes, the careful balancing of good and ill-fortune, success and disappointment, and the admirably realistic style in which the whole is written, the reader feels that they are all but artificial adjuncts of the moral to be taught, and that that moral is more important than the instruments by which it is illustrated. Of course we have no right to find fault with an author’s motive, especially when that motive is confessedly good and noble, but this is Miss Alcott’s first adventure in a more difficult and important field than any she has yet essayed, and it is necessary to point out that she is apparently working on a theory in which the best attainable success must be transient, and which is certainly opposed to that which actuated her earlier books. Those books we have always taken to be one of the most effective declarations of the rights of human nature against the despotic dogmas of literary and theologian moralists; and we are convinced that their great success was owing to the fact that they did not attempt to preach, teach, or illustrate any thing except the essential healthfulness and goodness of real “little men and women.” This simple plan has been abandoned in “Work,” and is superseded by that didactic element which has been a greater bane to American fiction than any lack of talent in our authors or want of variety in our social life.

Another reason probably why we feel so little interest in “Christie” and her associates is, that on the same principle
apparently that the author considers children as “little men and women,” she seems to regard men and women simply as “big” boys and girls. The youthfulness of everything in “Work” is perhaps its most striking and predominant feature, and one comes after a time to look upon the characters as children, with great shrewdness and extraordinary command of good language, playing at the “experiences” of men and women as they conceive them to be. This gives freshness and relief to the story and mitigates its sombre portions; but of course it renders impossible any thing like genuine sympathy and interest.

The conclusion to which all this has led us is, that in her first works Miss Alcott has indicated what is her true field of effort. She has written some of the best children’s books in the English language, or in any language. In this country at least she is without a rival who can compete on equal terms; while both here and everywhere there are plenty of writers who will undertake to settle all the problems which society presents by a book in which some hypothetical and impossible personages shall meet and solve them each and several.


Of them all [the summer’s novels], Miss Alcott’s first real novel, Work (Roberts Brothers), is perhaps the most noteworthy, as it certainly is the most noted. Miss Alcott’s name will give to this pleasant story a circulation and a celebrity which otherwise it would not attain. The book would not have made her reputation, but her reputation will make the book. The first thing that strikes the reader after he gets fairly under way is that the novel is not a novel at all, but a serious didactic essay on the subject of woman’s work. Not, indeed, that Miss Alcott has loaded it with instruction, or put on any unwomanly vestments and taken to preaching in the guise of a story-teller; but the bee on the cover, the motto on the title-page, the title itself, and the current and course of the story, all point in the same direction. Miss Alcott wished to exhibit the various phases of woman’s work, and the story was the instrument she chose for that purpose. Christie starts out in the opening chapter to take care of herself. She tries various avocations, and her hardships in each are graphically described. She is successively servant, actress, governess, companion, seamstress, assistant, and finally nurse in a soldiers’ hospital.

The first half of the story is without even the semblance of a plot. Miss Alcott appears to have sat down to write the first chapter without knowing what the next chapter would be, and to have drifted along in the current of her own thoughts till she found a novel growing under her hands. Then, under a sense that a novel needs design, she conceived a simple one, and finished off her series of sketches in a very simply constructed story. But despite this defect, and it is a serious one, she has written what is both an interesting and an entertaining narrative. Some of her pictures are exceedingly pretty; some of her characters are exceedingly well drawn. The best bit of painting in the book is Mrs. Wilkins and her home; and the contrast between the tireless energy of the wife and the nerveless quiet of the husband gives vividness to both. In Mrs. Wilkins’s home the unmanageable children play a principal part; and with them Miss Alcott is unmistakably in her element. Mr. Power may
be a portrait, as some of the critics have thought it, of Theodore Parker; if so, it is a portrait drawn by a feminine admirer, and clothed with traits that woman’s admiring imagination easily attributes to her heroes. A pleasant humor sparkles in the book, and a cheerful good nature imparts to it a singularly pleasant flavor. It is this sunny cheerfulness infused through all its pages by the glow of a woman’s bright, trusting, and loving heart, and which imbitters even the death of David “Sunrise,” which gives to the book its peculiar charm, and will make it acceptable to hundreds of readers, who will rise from its perusal stronger for the battle of life because of its inspiration, and who will hardly recognize, though they may vaguely feel, the defects which impair it as a work of art. In brief, passing by the externals of this story, which are not above criticism, and getting at its heart, we may say of it what Mrs. Wilkins said of Mr. Powers’s preaching: “Ain’t it fillin’? Don’t it give you a kind of spiritual h’ist, and make things wuth more, somehow?”

**The Lakeside Monthly**

10.57 (September 1873): 246–49.

This novel has been very highly praised, and in some quarters where favorable verdicts are usually delivered with some circumspection. The standard of its merit, then, has been lifted pretty high. With this reflection disappears whatever may have collected itself on a lower plane for commendation; and the applause with which we might have testified Miss Alcott’s success in several of the minor colloquies—for example, that in which the heroine consults Cinthy Wilkins about accepting Philip Fletcher’s second offer—is dumb before the demand for a suffrage for or against the effort as a whole. True, the title and plan of the book solicit from the reader a discriminating judgment. But it is stern to take a novelist too strictly at his word; for if the work is engaging, and not too obtrusively faulty, it may deserve praise enough to justify its publication. Here, however, the author’s admirers, by approving her execution of the undertaking, constrain us to examine touching the validity of their praise.

In the first place, the undertaking itself is a questionable one. We would not light down on the very cover of the book with its single word “Work,” and its symbolic bee, if we could not concede the fidelity with which the idea of work is adhered to throughout. Work is the real religion, the idea, the action of the piece, from end to end. We dare consent that work is an eminent excellence, essentially, instrumentally. The work of nature’s
meteorology and chemistry, the work of steam engines, the work of formulating ideas, realizing designs, chopping trees, or washing soiled clothes – all is excellent, because it is healthful in nature and man; it is useful, and, for the most part, indispensably requisite. More than any one thing, work brings happiness, and work secures against misery.

Such are the powerful motives to induce us all to go to work. And, in fact, we do so. But now is there not just about enough of this apotheosis of Madam Work? Is it not a frightful evil to the contemplation of our scientific teachers, that in this country we overwork? In getting foremost, the strong are weakened, and the weak are destroyed. It has come to pass that he that works moderately lags, and must fail, if he does not perish. But is immoderate work less destructive than immoderate drink? Whether this morbid and ruinous industry is chargeable to at least fifty years’ unchallenged supremacy of Work over every other god in New England, or to the mere intensity of competing ambition and avarice, it is certain that the practice is absolutely baleful of glorifying aught that has even the name of vice confessedly tending to general madness. In the South Sea, work is virtuous; in the United States, it is more than half vicious. Were a novel, under the title “Laziness,” and with amoral distinctly in favor of a life of utter inconsequence, to circulate extensively, we put it to candor if, where it would unstring one worthy resolution, it would not redress a thousand senseless and criminal overtasks? The sober and wholesome cui bono? is perfectly unanswerable by those the state of whose nervous centres qualifies them to applaud everything that is exhaustively laborious; for the concluding phrase of this story is about as sensible an answer as the case admits of. The heroine, then a comfortable widow of forty, with a daughter to train, and poor people – the weak, the sick, the ignorant, or the vicious – immediately about her, to help, to strengthen, to instruct or to moderate, for any ten hours, any day, in any community, but – it must be admitted – with no field for gratifying her desire to be publicly distinguished above men and women generally, resolves to mount the rostrum for a public career. This “work” is characterized thus: “The greatest of God’s gifts to us is the privilege of sharing His great work.” Of course, it is the privilege of any person to sanctify his labors – even his vices – by the claim that he is “sharing God’s work;” not that anybody in his senses believes that God needs his help in any way but perhaps by attending to his business without harming others, either by assaulting, oppressing, defrauding, or neglecting them, or, most culpably, by exciting their emulation for an unnatural and inevitably unrighteous scramble for some common object, in the hope of beating them, and calling it assistance rendered to God in his work; but that if he professes to believe it, nobody under the sun can gainsay him. In Western phrase, this is “too thin.” There is a kind of intellectual nausea excited by the spectacle of a disguise at once so beggarly and so hardy, for motives so vulgar.

We therefore condemn as mischievous, in proportion to its success, any publication tending to increase the already unnatural ardor of effort by inculcating the glory of a life of work. But of this production we may contemplate the issue with limited anxiety.

Of numerous and variegated, rather than contrasted characters, there is not one whose make-up includes the ingredient – thought to be so necessary somewhere in every novel – of sentiment. There is not even religion, except in those decent, well-worn stage properties, not to be spared without awkward blanks from certain extremities, even in novels. Nothing ideal, poetical, or even finely meditative is
suffered to expose the writer to the suspicion of sentimentalism. But the sentimentalism itself, which might at least have been caricatured and proscribed for symmetry [symmetry’s] sake, is ignored altogether. Some of the characters are foolish, some violent, some sordid, some generous, some strong, some weak; but amongst them all, nobody represents the sad, spiritual, beautiful nobody, who may be picked up any day, to make a necessary contrast to Christie, the heroine. Indeed, there is not a workless character in the whole plot, except Mrs. Saltonstall, a downright noodle.

The story is one of the most extraordinary assemblages of incredible events ever reconciled with a general air of verisimilitude. This is apparent upon the least scrutiny; though less so upon a careless perusal. A lady, whose only active solicitude is for her social position – which turns out to really be what was first signified by her liveried servants – employs a self-sufficient, nubile young stranger as a governess for her children, immediately on her presenting herself in answer to an advertisement, without even the form of a curiosity as to who she was; and her brother, an experienced man of the world, readily consents, still more improbably – he having just this much knowledge, that he secretly recognizes in her a person he had seen on the stage, a fact which she reserves. A family is introduced, in whom a known tendency to insanity – no very uncommon thing – remains entirely unsuspected by a younger sister, until she is a woman, when it is dramatically communicated, like a hitherto most practicable secret, by an older sister, who, while she is supposed to be still sane, though sick, in a manner the most strangely unfilial, with the sympathy of her brothers, too, declares war on her mother, not as a peevish ebullition, but as the result of solemn convictions of duty, for marrying their father with a knowledge of the malady in her relatives. That this conduct of a sane daughter did not set the mother crazy on the spot, she having – as yet potential, only – the whole stock of the dreaded insanity in her own head, is a separate and sufficiently absurd improbability; to which may be added the most improbably unsophisticated moral treatment – of course, he was a competent physician – of good Dr. Shirley. But no part of the narrative bears the least analysis. It is not a “Story of Experience,” since, to befit that name, the situations should be uncommonly credible.

But the undeniable insufficiency of imagination, thought, and sentiment, giving the story a sort of jobbed appearance, is unerringly shown by – at this late day – introducing the once indispensable “nigger,” with the cant of the subject in that coarseness of texture that refined abolitionists could indulge only during the delirium of the war; and which comes, in a book of this date, like that sometimes belated shriek, which would not have been rowdyish if it had come time enough to be tumultuous, in the general cheer. Slavery is abolished – let us have peace. For example, the husband of the heroine, entitled at least to die for his country in open battle, perishes in a despicable skirmish about a wench, who preferred an adventure in the Union camp to awaiting at home her certain deliverance from slavery. But this was preceded by an exploit, as whimsical as the occasion of it is inconceivable. All manner of white people conversant with negroes are acquainted with the practice of negroes toward their dead children. The Chinese, superior as they are, and, like negroes, making the funeral of adolescents or adults the occasions of ostentatious and clamorous grief, cast away the corpses of young children with indifference. Officials of the Freedmen’s Bureau early discovered, what all Southern people had told them, that the average negro mother was not reliable for the nurture
of her own living child, if found irksome. But the female contraband, in this case, in no respect presented as an exceptional person, in making her escape from slavery into a military camp, had, in a spirit assumed to be common to negro women, brought along a dead baby, which she said was hers. This she delivered to an officer of judgment and intelligence, of near two years’ service thereabouts, who, in the most affecting manner, buries it with his own hands. There was no tie of acquaintance, reciprocity of favor, or even association of ideas, connecting the parties, to redeem the extreme poverty of this contrivance for aggrandizing the hero of a story. It would insult the author herself to ask what probably became of the wretched negro, after this supposed sacrifice of a valiant and useful citizen. It is the most natural thing in the world, that this species of enthusiastic, all-embracing humanity, should elsewhere in the book confess utter intolerance for Irish.

The heroine herself is not a very distinct character. The publisher has been good enough to help the author by a portrait of Christie, at the head of the first chapter, of whom we are bound to say no phrenologist is needed to reveal her character – and it is a good one, too – even great. The girl in the picture is full of “work,” of every kind, of ambition, of pride, generosity, passion, and affection. As long as she was not in love, she would have a strong prepossession for a “mission,” a “self-relying career,” and a “determined independence.” But our word for it, when she found a man she deeply loved, she would reverence him with something the Christie whose story is told never so much as dreamed of – womanly selflessness. Then would come out a miraculous softness not possible to the self-defending, which, of course, is the same thing as the self-depending state. The girl in the picture would repulse with rash disgust and contempt the offer of a suitor that she did not respect. She could not possibly make up her mind to accept a man whose barren egotism she perfectly knew, and then, before she had time to say yes, refuse him irrevocably on the spot for making an inopportune manifestation of it. In actual life, this would betray a spirit meanly mercenary, willing to take a selfish invalid as a rich husband, provided he did not, by flagrantly exposing himself before marriage, compel her to admit that she knew what she was doing.

Again, the girl in the picture would never have loved – and, for that matter, neither would any superior girl – the David Sterling for whom the author has reserved her. The author says he was so and so pious and noble, and it is therefore to be so; but there is little enough to show it by. On the other hand, that impossible character – at least a trinity of persons in one – Philip Fletcher, by his devotion, shown in his lifting himself out of all the sloughs of petty egotism, indolence, and elegant debility, into comparative great-heartedness, all in order to please and win her, had claims on which no woman in the world would have turned her back in favor of the ready-made David, who, for aught we can see, was at least equally selfish, with that uncompromising kind of imperiousness which must be served implicitly, without even the joke of antagonism, because the moral excellence of the man, including perfect meekness, must be asserted for him by implications of plenary sanctity.

In a word, if the woman in the picture is the one in question, she never loved; or if that was love which made Christie nurse and serve David, even more faithfully than the other patients and soldiers amongst whom her well-done duties lay, it was the affection – ardent enough it may be, even intense to morbidness – of a woman, not gifted with the susceptibility of her sex, which makes the love of the right man, to none so much as to a strong and
self-reliant woman, a transmuting spell—utterly transmuting, because her character had so distinct a pole to change, and joyfully did change it.

This book is the story of a female who was not a woman, married to her choice who was not a man, taking these plain old words differentially in the range of those deeper and grander phases of life, where instinct, intuition, or inspiration—call it what you will—prescribes the unwitnessed work, and listens neither for yea or nay. If that range is in the heart, this book has not a heart. We trust the author has.


Miss Alcott has achieved a task of no little difficulty in writing a book with a purpose so skilfully and delicately that the presence of the purpose is never obtrusive or offensive; while at the same time those who take the trouble to read Work, which will repay them well for their exertion, cannot fail to be struck by its meaning, which is peculiarly applicable to the present state of things in England no less than in America. We do not wish to convey the impression that this is a novel with a sermon neatly wrapped up and disguised in its pages; on the contrary, although it expresses the result of serious thought and deep conviction on a question which has been much, we might say too much, agitated of late, it is singularly free from any tendency to sermonize—it is indeed neither more nor less than its second title announces it to be, “A Story of Experience.” The heroine of this experience is Christie Devon, an orphan girl, whom we find tired of the commonplace life she leads in the New England farmhouse of her uncle and aunt, where she is surrounded by bluff young farmers and buxom girls whose one ambition is to “get married,” and where she can find no sphere for the employment of the better talents which she possesses. Consequently she is on the point of leaving this home, and trying to get on and be of some use in the world by herself. She is the daughter of a poor gentleman of good descent, whom her mother, a New England girl, married after she, like Christie, had found the dull level of farmhouse life intolerable and gone out alone to seek for better things. We should be curious to know if the author designed this parentage to account for and fit the character she had previously conceived, or whether the character grew, as no doubt in the hands of a good artist it would, from the circumstances given. In any case the arrangement is a felicitous one; for while Christie inherits from her father a refinement of taste and perception which makes her at all times and in all situations a gentlewoman, from her mother she possesses an energy and promptitude which carry her through her own difficulties, and also those inborn instincts of sympathy with the masses which enable her to understand and alleviate the trials which attack the people of humbler descent than herself with whom she is thrown. This energy comes out strong on her entrance upon her adventurous career, when, after several vain efforts to obtain a situation as a governess, she resolves to “put her pride in her pocket and work her way up” by going out to service. This juncture reminds us of a novel of English life published a year or two ago by Mr. Aidé, In that State of Life, which had for its theme the unusual event of a girl born and bred in good society in this country going out as a sort of superior maid to an old lady.
But with the mere coincidence of fact the likeness ceases; for in Mr. Aïdé’s book the whole interest is concentrated upon what in Miss Alcott’s is merely an episode; and while the heroine of the former is very unlucky in the high-life-below-stairs which she has to encounter, while she finds an ardent admirer in the region of the drawing-room, Christie Devon discovers in Hepsey, the black cook and the sole companion of her labours, a woman with whose sorrows she can sympathize, and whose affection is a consolation and a relief from the pretentious vulgarity of Mrs. Stuart, the lady of the house. There is a good deal of quiet humour in the description of the amusement which Christie makes for herself in watching the peculiarities of her mistress and the visitors whom she attracts to her house, and one remark made by the author in her account of Christie’s experience as a handmaiden specially deserves attention: –

If masters and mistresses knew how skilfully they are studied, criticized, and imitated by their servants, they would take more heed to their ways and set better examples perhaps. [1 sentence omitted.]

Christie’s kindness to old Hepsey too, and the black woman’s mingled gratitude and surprise at it, have something very touching in them.

This “experience” of Christie’s is brought to an abrupt close by her setting the room on fire by reading in bed and forgetting to put out her candle – a catastrophe which leads to her dismissal, not so much on account of her offence as because her mistress, having given way to her feelings of rage and fright in the stress of the moment, feels that she has hopelessly compromised her dignity in the eyes of her servant. Thus this enterprising young woman is thrown once more upon her own resources, and by the friendly offices of another girl, with whom she had made friends at a boarding-house, lights upon the stage of a respectable theatre in the character of Queen of the Amazons in a grand spectacle. Her career on the stage is, if not brilliant, at least successful, and it affords occasion for the writer to show with how much freshness and force she can treat the well-worn subject of stage jealousy and intrigue, of which there is enough in this one portion of her heroine’s life to form the nucleus of an ordinary three-volume novel. There is indeed a grand lavishness about the manner in which Miss Alcott uses her materials. Almost every period of Christie’s various adventures contains a germ of plot which might easily be spread over the length of a whole book; yet there is no suggestion of piecing together in the result obtained, no such effect as that produced by individual pictures affixed without artistic instinct to a screen; the work is broad and harmonious.

From the kitchen to the stage is perhaps a longer leap than from the stage to the bosom of an upper-class family in the capacity of governess, which is the next situation filled by the much-enduring Christie. Mrs. Saltonstall, her new employer, is a fashionable lady devoted to dress and to little else, who is of small importance in the book; but from Mr. Philip Fletcher, her brother, comes the first offer of marriage which Christie thinks it well to weigh in her mind, the first temptation to give up for the sake of rest, luxury, and the chance of employing the world’s goods for the benefit of the world’s inhabitants, the more exalted and apparently less practical idea of struggling through danger and defeat to earn for herself by her own exertions a place and an influence among her fellow-beings. This Philip Fletcher’s character is drawn with considerable ability and truth; we see in him a man of good impulses suppressed rather than checked by the habits of bad health and an easy attainment of his
wishes, who by long indulgence has learnt to make the killing of time his great object, but in whom there is still such a spark of a fine nature remaining as is finally fanned to a flame by the influence of the woman whom he looks upon, first as a new object in the landscape of his daily life, then as an interest, finally as a desirable wife. The growth of his feeling, and its reflex action upon its object, are depicted with a fine perception of character; witness this passage, which describes his state of mind shortly before he makes his offer:

Something about this girl seemed to appeal to the old self, so long neglected that he thought it dead. [Remainder of 2 quoted paragraphs omitted.]

But when it comes to the actual proposal Miss Alcott makes a great mistake. It is, we conceive, very hard for a woman to represent in writing a man who has been more or less spoilt all his life, and accustomed to succeed in making women like him, and yet to keep him a gentleman all the time; since even George Eliot has, to our thinking, failed in this way both with Stephen Guest in the Mill on the Floss and with Lydgate in her latest novel. But, however this may be, certain it is that Mr. Fletcher, in offering his hand to Christie Devon, shows himself such an arrogant and insufferable snob that he more than justifies the indignant scorn of the refusal for which she herself is almost as unprepared as he is. It takes all the novelist’s skill to reinstate him in his position as a gentleman when he reappears long after this event, which naturally closes another chapter in Christie’s life.

Her next venture launches her, as companion to an invalid girl, into the midst of a family named Carrol, over whom hangs a strange mystery, which in the end turns out to be hereditary insanity. And here we cannot but think that Miss Alcott has over-tasked her powers. It can never be good art to deal in a novel, not otherwise than invigorating, and on the whole cheerful in tone, with so terrible a theme as this, any more than it would be to mix scraps from the gloomiest pages of Greek tragedy into a modern drama; the only thing that could excuse a writer for doing so would be the possession of some such wild and spasmodic genius as that of Edgar Poe, and it is assuredly not in his line that the author of the book now before us excels. Thus the only feelings excited in us by this part of the story are distaste and disappointment while we read, and relief when we have read. After the horrible climax which breaks up her relations with this family, Christie falls into illness and want, owing mainly to her refusal to cast off a woman with whom she has insisted on forming a friendship while they are fellow-workers at a large millinery establishment, upon the discovery that she has formerly been the reverse of respectable. This incident, and all its surroundings, are handled with a firmness and a sense of right which the author of The New Magdalen would have done well to study before he put his play on the boards. It is this girl who finally rescues Christie from suicide when she is utterly broken down by hard usage and desitution, and finds her a temporary refuge in the house of a laundress, by name Mrs. Wilkins, a character in whom, as elsewhere in the book, we recognize the influence of Dickens. Mrs. Wilkins is a woman who has been through many troubles, and from them acquired a large power of sympathy; she has thought for herself, and settled on a philosophy which we will let her explain in her own words, aptly illustrated from her profession:

“'Pears to me,” said Mrs. Wilkins, ironing rapidly as she spoke, “that folks is very like clothes, and a sight has to be done to keep ’em clean and whole.” [2 sentences omitted.]
From the care of this good Mrs. Wilkins, and chiefly by her means, Christie is transferred, as a sort of companion and housekeeper rolled into one, to the house of Mrs. Sterling, an old Quaker lady, which turns out to be her last haven of refuge. For here in the person of David, the only son of the kindly widow, she finds after many variations on the old chords of friendship, and doubt, and jealousy, the man who can hold her heart with his strong sweet nature. This is one of the best parts of the book; the character of David, who is so different from the melancholy romantic hero the girl has been prepared to see, is a fine conception, and is well sustained. Her woman’s curiosity to know the hidden trouble of his life, and the dramatic scene in which she discovers what that trouble is, leading up to his declaration of love for her, are described well and with unflagging interest; indeed the dialogue between them when their engagement is arranged is as pretty and unwearisome a love scene as we have ever read in a novel. With this happy event we could for our own satisfaction wish the book to conclude; but, as its somewhat stern title might lead us to expect, there is no such peaceful bliss as we should in that case infer in store for these young people. The Civil War, which has done duty as the crisis of so many novels, appears here as a sort of Deus ex machina, and they go off, David as a soldier, his wife as a nurse, while Mrs. Wilkins at the same time, fired by patriotism, succeeds in getting her Lisha away to the war by the employment of a somewhat humorous device. When this has happened, who can be ignorant of what is coming? Of course the former dandy Fletcher turns up with only one arm left in the thick of the fighting and finds his reward in the firm gentle nursing of Christie, and, still more of course, David is struck down by a shot through the lungs, and Christie arrives just in time to see him well through his deathbed scene. We confess to feeling a little angry with Miss Alcott both for employing so well-worn an artifice to get rid of David, and for getting rid of him at all. For her treatment of this scene, however, she deserves all praise; not so much for what she has said as for what she has with a rare wisdom and good taste left unsaid.

After the time of mourning for her husband’s death is over, Christie devotes herself to helping on the freed people—a good work in which she is assisted by a legacy of all his money from her old uncle, who, having retired ever since the first chapter, reappears just in time to do this and die, thus making the third death in the book. One of the last occasions on which we see the widowed Christie is at a meeting of working-women, the sketch of which is extremely well drawn. Many ladies, of course, are there, rich in theory, poor in practical method of relief; one talks over the heads of her audience, telling them of Hypatia and Aspasia, giving history to those who ask for bread; another cheerfully reads the statistics of suicide and starvation among shopwomen; presently rises Christie, and by the magnetism of her sympathy and her actual experience of what those whom she addresses suffer, her words go straight to their hearts, and they depart not unsatisfied. Shortly after this Bella Carrol turns up again, and comes to Christie for advice as to how she shall best employ her time and opportunities for the good of her sisters, and from what Christie says to her the reader will see something of the conclusion to which all her experience has brought her: –

I want you to make Harry’s home as beautiful and attractive as you can; . . . [remainder of paragraph omitted]. Let us to this excellent piece of advice subjoin the last paragraph of the book, and we will say good-by to Christie Devon and her experience. She is standing surrounded
by her friends and her child, expressing her resolve to devote her whole life to the work she has taken up. She has stretched her hands out with an impulsive gesture, and they have been promptly seized by those standing round her: –

“Me too,” cried little Ruth, and spread her chubby hand above the rest: . . . [remainder of sentence omitted].

Miss Alcott has faults in her writing; a tendency to ramble, a habit of imitating not only the spirit, but the mere verbal tricks of Dickens, whose works she has evidently studied; an occasional disregard of the arrangement of her words, and an inclination to run too much to climax. We hope to meet her again with these and other faults corrected, and with the same merit that we have found in Work. Meanwhile we recommend this as an excellent book to all young women who are discontented with their present lives, who feel that they have no sphere for the exercise of their virtues, who have vague longings for an ideal existence which they cannot formulate, and who may be in danger of quitting their inherited place in society to seek some new form of faith or some novel plan of life.

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Miss Alcott is rapidly rising to the level of the very best female novelists of America. Her present work will more than sustain the reputation which she won two or three years ago by ‘Little Women.’ It is full of vigour, keen discrimination, racy characterization, and effective dialogue. Christie, the heroine, is a finely balanced charac-ter, good enough and noble enough to win our sympathies and to stimulate our better feelings; but not ‘too good for human nature’s daily food.’ An orphan niece, she revolts at her dependence upon cruel old Uncle Enos, and determines to make her own way in the world. She experiments as servant, actress, governess, companion, seamstress, and general household help; passing through manifold vicissitudes, and furnishing a text for the illustration of various phases of American life. Only an American girl could have played so many parts, or passed with such facility from the one to the other; the freedom of social life, and the self-esteem of the American character make it impossible to forecast any man’s vocation. A journeyman tailor has no sense of unfitness in applying for the managership of a bank, and there is no social incongruity in the transition. The fine qualities of Christie’s character preserve her in all her trials. She finds refuge at last with a sweet old quakeress, whose son David, after a due amount of love tribulations, ultimately marries her. He becomes a soldier, she a hospital nurse in the rebel war. That nothing may be lacking in the cycle of woman’s experience he leaves her a widow. A sympathetic portraiture of Theodore Parker, Mrs. Wilkins’ minister, has considerable prominence, and is well done. The story is a very able and a very wholesome one.

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A little group of sojourners at a country boarding-house, we have just finished
reading aloud and talking over Miss Alcott's "Work," and I am commissioned to tell you how materially we all differ from your critic, Mary Thacher. Some of us had concluded not to read "Work," we had n't time to give it, we thought, after your criticism; but the tide went against us, when we got out here; "Work" was in the packet of books a good friend had put up for our summer reading, and after a while we dipped into it, the majority ruling. We are grateful to that majority; we like Miss Alcott; we forget we are not her personal friends when we come to judge her books; we grow enthusiastic when we sound her well-deserved praises; she makes us young again, and truer and better; we like her, – bad boys, slang phrases, and all; she is so true to life where she pictures it; no romance or falseness or glitter; only "good time," and honest, grateful happiness in humble homes and beside cheery firesides, such as we have need to thank God for, – at least the memory of, – if prosperity and culture have refined them to only a memory.

We think Mary Thacher "damns with faint praise"; she leaves the impression of a well-told story of a work-a-day life, a mere matter of incident, sentiment, and circumstance. We think Christie’s poor little romance a very poor thing, if that were all; just how she waited and worked and wept; just when she met defeat and how she overcame difficulty, and finally how she “found religion” in “work” instead of patient waiting. All these are facts of the book; but we think we have a deeper meaning in Miss Alcott’s effort, unless she painted better than she knew, as many an artist has done before her. To us, Christie has presented, in pleasanter guise than either lecture or essay could, the author’s serious convictions of the relationship which ought to exist between woman and her work, and how her way is hedged about and rendered painful, profitable, or possible, ast he [as the] case may be, in the various positions in which she places her heroine. It is woman’s work and woman’s wages of which Miss Alcott writes, not Christie’s pitiful battle with fate, although she sustains her beautifully to the end; from the hour when she resolved with a girl’s ignorance and enthusiasm to go out alone and earn her own living, until she comes home from her woman’s mission of army nurse, with a broken heart and blighted hopes, still true to herself and her faith in God’s best blessing of work, her “little one” demanding the final exertion which enabled her to live faithfully through the last worst ordeal of woman’s life, a widowed motherhood!

She seems to have left little unsaid upon this weighty question of woman’s work and woman’s responsibility. Take, for instance, Christie’s life with the Carrolls; less, we think, meant to furnish a “skilful touch of the melodramatic” than opportunity made to most forcibly urge, without any special pleading, the terrible wrong that is every day done by young people, eager for their own happiness or ambitious of worldly ease and position, and ignorantly or weakly ignoring the facts which all old enough to contemplate marriage ought to know concerning hereditary disease. Nothing but a criminal ignorance or false modesty could deter a parent from the plainness of speech and earnest effort which should save a child from contracting an alliance with one, no matter how well beloved, who is the heir to hopeless disease, mental or physical; yet we all know that young people of today need more than a word spoken in season, and we can at least hope that the painful picture of Miss Carroll’s fearful sufferings and suicidal death may not be so highly wrought that the readers of “Work” will not recognize it as the real experience of life, and profit thereby. Christie’s brave espousal of poor Rachel’s
cause, who so patiently and pathetically perseveres in her work of self-redemption, is surely not so much to interest the reader in the trials and temptations of our heroine as to lay before us at least the outline of “work” which waits for us to do, and wrongs which are daily with us to be righted. Was the “work” of “Mrs. Wilkins, clear-starcher,” the only “work” which suggests itself in that humble connection? The labor of love executed so unpretendingly towards and in behalf of her humble neighbors, the brave, unselfish, up-hill pull of Mrs. Wilkins for her country, to say nothing of her promising young sons of the republic, all give evidence of the good “work,” and how it gets done in the lowliest places, or waits for us in narrow ways and broad. “Work” does n’t seem to be Christie’s little story, but the dear Christ’s “work” waiting for His followers everywhere, and we thank Miss Alcott for showing us her view of it.

“Miss Alcott.” [Massachusetts newspaper?] ([1873?]). Clippings File.

The announcement of another story by Louisa M. Alcott sets in a twitter a round million of readers who have devoured and digested that remarkably popular series, from “Little Women” to “Shawl Straps,” with appetites still unappeased. Messrs Roberts Brothers, to whom so many are indebted for the pleasure of reading Miss Alcott in agreeable book form, with the attractions that any story receives in the adjuncts of good print and clear paper, now produce another volume in yet more dainty dress, entitled “Work; a Story of Experience.” It is a distinct story, standing complete in itself, with no reference to the well-known characters of preceding tales, and with little margin for a sequel. Aunt Jo is quite left out of sight, and it is a new set of names, if not exactly of characters, to which we are introduced. Indeed, were Miss Alcott to produce a conception different from the independent, nice girl who makes her own living, and the good, homely man of middle age, and refuse to “develop” these personages mutually and finally marry them, the public might reasonably decline to recognize her prestige in such a work. That this cast is one approved by popular favor, is an indisputable fact, and Miss Alcott has in this instance the valuable assistance of Mr Sol Eytinge, who pictures her ideas with his pencil in as characteristic style as that in which they are portrayed by her pen. Christie Dovon is the heroine of this story, who is at once removed from the region of girlhood by her introduction to the reader at the age of twenty-one, with the full-fledged determination to leave her country home with uncle and aunt and earn her own livelihood in the city. As the author describes her, “Christie was one of that large class of women who, moderately endowed with talents, earnest and true-hearted, are driven by necessity, temperament or principle out into the world to find support, happiness and homes for themselves. [1 sentence omitted.]” Probability is, of course, out of place in a work of fiction directed to illustrate an ideal, and when one has sternly made up his mind to admit the possibility of Christie’s very entertaining adventures, the story runs along on wheels. The first resource of the heroine, in the way of earning her bread, is to take service as “second girl” in a fashionable family, where the humility of the cook, an escaped slave, reconciles her to the work of blacking her employer’s boots, and her aesthetic nature is developed by
listening to conversation on art and music through the crack of the parlor doors. Unfortunately, she sets the house on fire by reading in bed with a candle, and is discharged. It may not be credible, but from the kitchen Christie steps to the stage, first appearing as leader of the Amazons in a fairy spectacle — although she by no means "forgot the modesty of nature" in the stage costume — and in a wonderfully short space of time is advanced to the position of first soubrette in the regular dramatic company, becomes a popular favorite and plays "Peg Woffington" at her own benefit in a manner that charms even the critics. Such sudden promotion and strange success, in the absence of study and preparation, may be unknown elsewhere; but in the world which Miss Alcott has peopled so pleasantly, managers and public are doubtless as exceptional in their nature as the dramatic geniuses whom they produce out of rural seclusion through the education of domestic service. Christie, however, does not find even the stage of wonderland thoroughly agreeable. She is injured by the fall of some scenery, and on recovery disappoints the public by throwing up her engagement and going out as governess. But her fate is not yet upon her. After her experience as governess, she takes the place of companion to a melancholy young lady, whose suicide again releases her to seek a poor subsistence by sewing. When at length she fails to earn enough to live upon, the inevitable friend appears to find her a place with a remarkably benevolent florist, who forthwith proves herself her destiny. But it would be unpardonable to anticipate the pleasure to be derived from following out the story of Christie's love to the painful but not unhappy end, about which Miss Alcott weaves so much brightness that it can hardly be called melancholy. A cynical reader may, indeed, heartily approve the bloody removal of the too good husband, having experience, in the person of Miss Alcott's Professor, of what tiresome personages these middle-aged paragons are. The disposal of David Sterling, moreover, admits the introduction of some of Miss Alcott's hospital experiences, which are always vivid and interesting; and it is indisputable that her hero and heroine appear more favorably in their short career as soldier and nurse in the army and hospital than when sentimentalizing over cut flowers in the city greenhouse. There is real and true pathos in this part of the story, and the reader who would carry away the pleasantest impression of the tale will do well to close the book without reading the last chapter. The story is written in a bright and entertaining style, as we have no need to inform readers of Miss Alcott's works. One homely scene, where Christie takes care of the children of a remarkable laundress on Sunday afternoon, is well worth quoting:—

Six lively infants were congregated in the "settin'-room," and chaos seemed to have come again, for every sort of destructive amusement was in full operation. [Remainder of paragraph omitted.]

There are many of such pictures in the book, bright, natural, and showing a careful eye to those details which make up the reality of life. Indeed, the extra-natural quality of Miss Alcott's stories is found chiefly in the development of the ideal moral purpose. In the description of scenes and of incidents, as when telling of the morning rehearsal of the spectacle play, or of the hospital experiences of her heroine, she is admirable and unaffected. In delineating character and purpose, so much cannot be said. This latest story, which is the most pretentious of her works, has her faults and excellences in full measure; and for that reason it will not fail of a hearty popular reception. For the very errors of
Few American writers have achieved such wide spread and deserved popularity as Miss Alcott. Her fame is not the result of a few spasmodic works that have attracted sudden attention by appeals to the too prevalent sensational taste of the day; it has been built up by degrees, by literary efforts that have been grounded upon a substantial and enduring basis; books whose sterling worth and solidity rank them with that class which perform the higher mission of directing the intellectual and moral faculties into purer, broader channels than are presented in the more brilliant but ephemeral productions which serve but as toys of an idle hour. Her writings have a purpose, and that always an elevating and refining one, and a tone as healthful and invigorating as the breezes from her New England hills. Modestly presenting herself but a comparatively short time since as a writer of stories chiefly intended for young persons, her “Little Men” and “Little Women” soon attracted attention and gave evidence of an ability for the possession of which she, no doubt, did not give herself credit. At the same time her contributions to the periodicals of the day from time to time strengthened the opinion of earlier admirers and added to their constantly increasing circle. “An Old Fashioned Girl” was another book which merited and received strong commendation from all classes, and she soon found that she could also write to please children of larger growth than her earlier auditors. So strong has been the impression she has made that everything from her pen is now sure of a legion of readers, and not only in her own land, but by British critics has she been accorded a high place as one of the most original and pleasing American writers of fiction. In fact, her style is distinctively her own, and it is in its freshness and freedom from affectation, the naturalness of her characters and her broad, true views of life and its duties, that the charm of her books consists.

In the one under consideration the heroine and chief figure of the story, “Christie Devon,” is a young New England girl, who, too spirited to eat the bread of dependence in her uncle’s house, starts out boldly to win her own way in life, with no other motto and no other idea of attaining success than is conveyed in the rigorous monosyllable “work.” In her career, she undergoes many vicissitudes and encounters numerous hardships, temptations and perils. First engaging in the humble capacity of servant, but with an honest pride that lifts her above any feeling of degradation in it, she afterward becomes an actress, next a governess, and, later still, a seamstress, in which position she is, through sickness, reduced to the extreme of poverty, and, finally, in despair, is driven to contemplate suicide, from which she is saved by a young girl whom she had previously saved from a worse fate, and who later plays a still more important part in the story. Her spirit is, however, too strong to be permanently affected by reverses, and in an estimable family where
she fortunately finds a home more as a friend than as a servant, her noble qualities of mind and heart meet with just appreciation and eventually secure the love of a man fully worthy of her, to whom she wisely gives the preference over a lover, who, though possessed of wealth and more elegance of appearance and manner, is yet devoid of the more solid qualities of his less assuming rival. In the love story of “Christie” and her husband, his departure for the war and subsequent death in her arms in the hospital, we have all the tenderest elements of romance, while in the heroism with which she takes up the burden of duty, after recovering from the shock which has deprived her life of all that made it beautiful and glorious, and her devotion, with kindred associates, to the grand idea of alleviating the toil, the sorrows and the perils of those of her own sex, with which, from her own experience, she knew so well how to sympathize, furnishes the best possible antidote to the mass of cotemporary fiction with its exaggerated sentimentalism and false ideas of life. It is throughout a most fascinating book, and its perusal cannot fail to convey a useful lesson no less than to entertain the reader.

Miss Louise M. Alcott, in this, her last novel, has departed from her usual line of writing, and instead of appealing to boys and girls, talks to men and women. The book is evidently written for a distinct purpose, the text of which is, “Help, if you would be helped; love, if you would be loved; work if you would be saved.” But for all that, it is thoroughly a novel. Christie, the principal character, after a “bringing up” in a family where every ambition was checked, and all was drudgery and incompatibility, when arriving at the age of womanhood, embarks upon the sea of life, and unaided and alone enters upon the struggle of existence. Through the varied scenes of teacher, sub-actress, and mantua-maker she plods her weary way, with varied and hard-earned success. In the last occupation she meets with Rachel, a quiet and shy girl, upon whom falls the odium of having strayed from the paths of virtue. To Christie’s inquiry if this be true Rachel answers:

It is true that I once went astray, but God knows I have repented; ... [remainder of paragraph omitted].

Christie resolves to stand by the poor unfortunate and when the employees and madame ostracise the erring but repentant girl, Louise [Christie] is obliged, in consequence of the defense of her, to leave and once more seek for work and bread. To an invitation extended to Rachel to share the common lot, she receives this reply:

“No yet. Not yet,” was Rachel’s steady answer. [1 sentence omitted.]
“I never can go back; ...” [remainder of paragraph omitted].

And she kept her word; but strangely their lives from this era are interwoven and in the due course of time Christie meets Rachel’s brother David; an engagement follows and their marriage. The war of the rebellion commencing at this time David volunteers and leaves his wife for the field of glory. After two years of service he is killed. Henceforth Christie is employed in teaching and instructing David’s son, who came after his death to fill the void so vacant and drear. All praise is due to Miss Alcott for the noble impulse and
Conclusive testimony as to the fact that Miss Alcott is established among the most popular of modern writers of fiction is furnished in the statement of her publishers, Messrs. Roberts Brothers, that her latest novel, Work, comes before the world in book form with advance orders for fifteen thousand copies. This does not prove her to be a great novelist. Miss Alcott's reputation had been made by what may be more strictly termed story-writing, than by the production of the legitimate novel. She had written one book that may be classed with novels—"Moods," which displayed decided talent, and evinced higher intellectual qualities than her more successful stories. It did not prove Miss Alcott to be a great novelist, however. Neither do we find conclusive evidence of it in this volume. "Work" is a very different story from "Moods." It is a much healthier one, and consequently better worth writing. We are very sure that the great mass of the reading public will think it a far better book. It has many admirable qualities. It is sensible, strong, lively, and interesting. Its atmosphere is agreeable [agreeable]; the lesson it teaches is excellent; its leading characters are generally drawn with fidelity to the best moral life that we see about us; and its incidents, which are many and varied, are cleverly wrought out. The aim of the book is not to produce any especially ambitious effects. It is simple and straightforward—a story, rather than a close study of character, though, as we have said, the sketching of character, as far as it is attempted, is generally entirely satisfactory. There certainly need be no reservation in opinion on this point as regards the heroine. Christie Devon is a good type of the conscientious, self-reliant New England woman. She satisfies the reader in every stage of her career, of which career the book is almost solely occupied in the relation. Christie starts out from a home that has become unpleasant to her, to encounter life in Boston. She undertakes house service at first, but proves to be not fitted for it— at least, in the estimation of her mistress, with whom most housekeepers will be likely to agree. She next attempts the career of an actress. Her life here is well described. Miss Alcott herself has had some experience on the amateur stage, and pictures to us Christie in one of her own favorite parts. Christie makes a friend of an actor of the old school, who must be Warren, if he is anybody. She abandons the stage because its life is not consistent with her ideas of the best development of character. Then she becomes a companion, a governess, a dressmaker, a seamstress, passing through varied fortunes, which are very vividly and very naturally described. At the time her lowest estate is reached, she is introduced by a friend to the Rev. Mr. Power, in whom no one can fail to recognize the portrait of Miss Alcott's early friend and adviser, Theodore Parker. Him she describes as "a sturdy man of fifty, with a keen, brave face, penetrating eyes, and mouth a little grim; but a voice so resonant and sweet it reminded one of silver trumpets, and stirred and won the hearer with irresistible power. [1 sentence omitted.]" There is much more relating to Mr. Parker's life and work and habits in this portion of the book, which will be recognized and enjoyed. Christie finds her husband in a gardener, to whose mother she is sent to do housework by Mr. Power. She marries this youth
in humble life, after having previously rejected a more eligible match in social position. She follows her husband to the army as a hospital nurse, and attends him on his death-bed, to which a wound has brought him. She returns a widow, to find herself shortly after in possession of a modest competence, which the story leaves her bestowing upon the needy after a philanthropic system of occupation that she has adopted.

The aim and animus of the book may be found in this declaration that we take from its last chapter: “Without my work,” said Christie, “I should fall into despair or ennui. There is so much to be done, and it is so delightful to help do it, that I never mean to fold my hands till they are useless. [1 sentence omitted.]” We do not feel that we have forestalled or obstructed the reader’s interest in it by the sketch of the plot that we have given. The filling in of this skeleton is varied and pleasing to a rare degree, while there is nothing in the nature of the plot that makes it very difficult to anticipate its development at any stage. The book is more ambitious, as a story, than are “Little Women” and “The Old Fashioned Girl,” and has less that is original and thoughtful, regarded as a novel, than “Moods.” But we are still inclined to regard it as a book more to be praised than either of them, and to characterize it as the most commendable fruit of still ripening talent.

**Appletons’ Journal** 11.251 (10 January 1874): 64.

The English critics are determined to marry off Miss Alcott. The *Saturday Review* has steadily refused to entertain the idea that she is single, and now the Spectator reviews “Work” as “a novel by Mrs. Alcott.” This is the penalty of knowing so much about little men and women.

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**New Bedford Standard.**

It is seldom that an author can achieve four successive triumphs such as Miss Alcott has in “Little Women,” “Little Men,” “Old-Fashioned Girl,” and now in this new candidate for public favor.

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**New York Evening Mail.**

No novel can be purposeless which brings sunshine into the home or the heart, and to say that Miss Alcott’s books hitherto have been without purpose is to use the word in very limited meaning. She has done a vast deal of good. But now she has reached that higher stage of development in which purpose is not simply a factor, but the chief factor of writing. She would do something more than entertain, however blessed that in itself be; she would exert her utmost powers directly in uplifting. That is good for her and for her readers. She is proving herself even a greater writer than her admirable “Little Women” series asserts. For that canon of art which rules out work because it is purposeful restrains
the scope of art within too narrow bounds. Purpose is the inspiration of the highest art.


You often hear the remark made by ladies with reference to the difficulties women experience in self support: “Well, if I were forced to support myself, I should seek domestic service; it is more healthful, more remunerative, and more sheltered than other kinds of work.” That is one of the lessons Miss Alcott and Mrs. Whitney strove to inculcate in “Christie's Work” and “The Other Girls.” But the homes and mistresses in those books were largely imaginary. I wonder if Louisa Alcott would, with the patience she ascribes to Christie, have pulled off any man's muddy books. I suspect there would have been a new Declaration of Independence stronger than any Christie ever gave. No; although Miss Alcott has described many of her own experiences in her books, *that* is something she never tried to do; and very few American girls of any spirit would attempt it – not because there is anything degrading in the work itself, but simply because of the stigma attached to it.

Times are vastly different now from the old Puritan days, when the girl was a “help” instead of a “servant,” was treated as a friend by her master and mistress, ate with them at table, and shared as an equal their home life.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices


*The New Englander* 32.124 (July 1873): 598.

CUPID AND CHOW-CHOW, VOL. 3 OF
AUNT JO’S SCRAP-BAG (1874)
“Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag” is looked after by multitudes of eager eyes, anxious to see and enjoy what is going in next. “My Boys” was jolly; “Shawl Straps” were buckled to; and now here are “Cupid and Chow-Chow,” not outdone by its predecessors. Miss Alcott’s pen is always so welcome that the publishers, Roberts Brothers, have only to announce her works to be certain that they will quit their counter as fast as they can manufacture them; for naturalness, fun and true sentiment, born of a hearty love and a careful study of children, they cannot fail of finding readers so long as there are mothers in the land or anybody else seeking to please Young America.

Miss Alcott’s third volume of Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag has the best of all morals, that a simple, faithful, domestic life is the happiest for women; and the stories which convey this moral are bright and entertaining; but they do not seem especially suited to children, who would hardly appreciate the satire on society which characterizes many of them. Besides these good-natured satires, there are stories that have a great deal of sweetness, tenderness, fun and pathos in them. Like all Miss Alcott’s books, this teaches lessons of unselfish love and pure domestic happiness.

This is the best of the “Scrap-Bag Series.” It has charming pictures of common life, and fanciful sketches of imaginary persons. The ideal people, however, teach sharp and plain lessons to real folks. “Kate’s Choice” is especially admirable.

A third series of Miss Alcott’s Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag has been issued for the holidays by Roberts Brothers, and therein ten charming stories, in the author’s very best vein, appear, with illustrative drawings by Miss Ledyard that can scarcely be excelled. This announcement would seem to be sufficient to interest all friends of the little ones; but we may add we will present next season a gift-book to all our readers’ little ones if they purchase this dainty volume and are disappointed in its contents.

For the third time Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag comes to us freshly filled with all that can delight young hearts, whether their heads are frosted with the snows of many winters or are bright with the sunshine of early spring. There are ten sketches in this little
volume full of the shrewd kindliness which have made Miss Louise M. Alcott’s writings so popular in every household. She never tells a story without a meaning, and though she does not obtrude a moral upon the reader with a vein of pleasant satire she lets the daylight into dark places, and shows the weaknesses of humanity while she records its virtues. Roberts Brothers have fittingly enshrined these pleasant stories.


Miss Alcott’s new book, “Cupid and Chow-Chow, etc.,” – a third volume of “Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag,” contains ten short stories, which have mostly appeared in some periodical, and are here brought together for a holiday book, to amuse children and grown people. They are all interesting stories, and all breathe a wholesome moral tone, though the moral lesson conveyed by each may not be always distinctly seen. Only one of the ten is illustrated throughout, but that is done with some of Miss Ledyard’s daintiest drawing, so that the pleasant pages are made more attractive by the pictures. It is just the book for a Christmas or New-year’s present, and will maintain Miss Alcott’s reputation as an easy, humorous and humane writer of stories.


All the children will welcome number three of “Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag.” It is called Cupid and Chow-Chow and other stories, and is a collection of stories for children in Miss Alcott’s best manner. Perhaps older people may get a valuable lesson from the example of the two children Cupid and Chow-Chow; at all events children will read that and the other stories and be the better for them. Miss Addie Ledyard has made some pretty illustrations for the volume, which is a very neat one for Christmas.

**Zion’s Herald** 50.52 (25 December 1873): 412:5.

It is enough for one Christmas to have a new book from Miss Alcott, who wrote the “Little Women.” Here it is, published by Roberts’ Brothers. It is called Aunt Joe’s Scrap-Bag. Never was such a wonderful bag better filled. We need not advise our young readers to call for this. All must have it.

**The Literary World** 4.8 (1 January 1874): 125.

“Cupid and Chow-Chow,” an instalment of “Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag,” contains ten short stories in Miss Alcott’s happiest vein. Of them all, perhaps, “Huckleberry” – a singularly natural little sketch, full of fun and pathos – will be most popular; but the little story which contrasts two systems of education is very amusing, and veined with quiet satire.
Miss Alcott, the indefatigable, has appeared with another installment of Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag (Roberts Brothers). Everything that the author of Little Women writes is readable and amusing, though she occasionally offends against good taste. We cannot wholly approve of the first story in this book – Cupid and Chow-Chow – where there is some rather old talk between the youthful characters about marrying for money. Other stories are, Nelly’s Hospital, Grandma’s Team, Fairy Pinafores, Mamma’s Plot, Huckleberry, etc.

First among the juvenile books before us we place Miss Alcott’s Cupid and Chow-Chow (Roberts Brothers), in serene confidence that the only critics of whom we stand in awe – the children into whose hands the volume will fall – will confirm our judgment. Ten stories make up the book, which appears as the third in the “Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag” series; its predecessors being “My Boys” and “Shawl-Straps.” Of these ten “Nelly’s Hospital” was printed years ago in one of the first volumes of Our Young Folks, whence its accompanying illustration has borne it company. The others we have not seen before; although it is possible that the readers of Merry’s Museum or the Youth’s Companion will recognize some of them as old friends. They are all delightful, of course; and we would advise grown-up people not to remand the enjoyment of the book to the children alone, but unostentatiously to read it for themselves, after the little ones have been put to bed. In the sketch which gives the volume its title, furthermore, they will find a quiet satire which will amply reward them for its perusal, even if (save the mark!) they have grown too old to enjoy a good juvenile.

Miss Alcott’s little stories are written in that peculiar vein which interests alike children and those of older growth. For the little ones, there is plenty of incident and adventure, for the elders, a thoughtful portraiture of character; and a verisimilitude that appeals to both – “Nelly’s Hospital” and “Cupid and Chow-Chow,” are each a finished story, and impress themselves upon the childish memory. One of the best of holiday series is Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag.

Miss Alcott has the knack of throwing off for young folks graceful trifles, suitably pointing a moral. Here are ten stories, apparently contributed to a newspaper or
small periodical, very charmingly written. The story which gives its title to the volume we like the least, although its covert satire on strong-minded women is clever and humorous; but we do not like the precocity of American children playing at marriage, &c., and have no wish that our English children should be initiated into it.

**The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review**

n.s. 45.2 (1 April 1874): 601–02.

“Cupid and Chow-Chow” is an amusing collection of stories which may suit old as well as young. The first tale, from which the volume takes its name, is as good as any. Cupid is a little five-year old, so called from his resemblance to the god, especially in his blindness in love matters. He has, however, neither wings, nor arrow, nor dart. He is the most inoffensive, dimpled, golden-haired lover conceivable. He falls desperately in love with his little cousin, Chow-Chow, who resembles the preserve of that name, and has as much sour as sweet in her composition. The course of such love runs very unsmoothly. Chow-Chow is an ardent disciplinarian, an advocate of the Rights of Women, probably a supporter of “Women’s Whisky War,” and, if we may just hint a defect in such a character, somewhat of a tomboy. Poor Cupid is no match for such a Yankee Amazon. “Free speech, free love, free soil, free everything; and Woman’s Puckerage for ever!” cries the little lady. She soon puts her theories into action. She cuts off poor Cupid’s golden locks, covers his dimples with sticking-plaster, and nearly chops off his fingers to test his bravery. After Cupid has successfully passed through all these ordeals, he is allowed to play at husband. This is decidedly the cleverest part of the story. The satire is here keener and better directed. The two little people remind us, and in no way to Miss Alcott’s disparagement, of one of Dickens’s most beautiful Christmas stories, where two little things run away to some child’s Gretna Green. To draw children is by no means the easy matter commonly supposed. Authors generally succeed in making them childish instead of childlike. One or two great names, both in literature and art, stand supreme in painting infancy, when, as Coleridge says, “body and spirit are in unity.” We hope Miss Alcott may draw many more such Twoshoes, such as Reynolds might have painted.

**The Ladies’ Repository**


This series contains ten delightful stories, told in the author’s best style, and as full of vivacity and freshness as two hundred pages can well be.

**Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices**

*Eclectic Magazine* n.s. 9.3 (March 1874): Sup. 2.
EIGHT COUSINS; OR, THE AUNT-HILL (1875)
I like that story of Louisa M. Alcott’s. I hope most of it will be about the boys, for, if I am a girl, I like stories of boys better than I do stories of girls; there is so much more excitement in boys’ stories. I like tragedy; I could sit all day and read Shakespeare.

Miss Louise M. Alcott is publishing a story in a magazine. It is called “Eight Cousins.” The title was doubtless suggested by Miss Douglas’s highly successful story, “Seven Daughters,” published in our Magazine. For aught we know, it may be a very good story, and worthy the fame of the author. We have read only the portion to which our attention has just been called, and looked over two or three chapters of another portion. It is a critical story; or, at least, it contains a chapter of criticism. The topic is “Sensational Books for Boys,” and she treats it as flippantly as though she knew what she was writing about. The mother of the two boys in the story says she “has read a dozen at least of these stories,” from which we infer that Miss Alcott has read them; but, judging from some of the quotations she makes, she read them with her elbows.

She objects to “these popular stories;” but she is very indefinite. She mixes things terribly. She quotes from one book, and judges another by what she quotes. She quotes from the Optic books, and then fastens upon them the sins of other books, as we shall presently show. But the lady shall speak for herself: –

“I’m sure they [the stories] can do no good to the better class of boys who through these books are introduced to police courts, counterfeiter’s dens, drinking saloons, and all sorts of low life.” We entirely agree with all this; and in not one of the Optic books are such places ever introduced, except in a manner to create an aversion to them. We judge from what follows that Miss Alcott did not intend to include them in this part of her condemnation.

“Some of them are about first-rate boys, mother; and they go to sea, and study, and sail round the world, having great larks all the way,” one of the sons says to the critic. Of course this means the Optic books; and the mother replies, with a heavy pun, “I have read about them, Geordie; and though they are better than the others, I am not satisfied with these optical delusions, as I call them. Now, I put it to you, boys, is it natural for lads from fifteen to eighteen to command ships, defeat pirates, outwit smugglers, and so cover themselves with glory that Admiral Farragut invites them to dinner, saying, ‘Noble boy, you are an honor to your country’?”

“Is it natural?” that’s the conundrum, and we could “guess it” if we only knew what the writer meant. In the Optic books “lads from fifteen to eighteen do not command ships, defeat pirates, or outwit smugglers.” Not an instance of the kind can be found in any one of them. The vessels of the Academy squadron are nominally in command of boys, but really
under the direction of the ex-naval officers on board of them; just as boys command regiments, battalions, and companies in the Boston High Schools, as well as in a score of other places. In this way it is perfectly natural “for lads from fifteen to eighteen to command ships.” “Admiral Farragut invites them to dinner.” In the book “Brave Old Salt,” the admiral invites Jack Somers, the hero of the story, to dine with him; but he does not say, “Noble boy, you are an honor to your country,” or anything like it. We quote from this book:

“Mr. Somers, I am happy to see you. I have heard of you before, and I doubt not we shall be able to make you very useful to your country.”

“Thank you, sir,” replied Somers, not daring to say any more, and with the feeling of his childhood, that ‘boys ought to be seen, not heard.’

“The admiral, with this judicious commendation, turned to Captain Cascabel, and opened conversation with him, evidently determined not to spoil the young man by taking too much notice of him.”

Somers was twenty years old at this time; and when he was twenty-one he had the command of a small steamer: but he had been through the Naval Academy, and had four years’ service in the navy. The critic is certainly very sensational in her dealings with facts. Then she alludes to the “hero in the army,” who “goes to Washington at the express desire of the president or commander-in-chief, to be promoted to no end of stars and bars.” All this is the critic’s fiction and sensationalism, for it does not appear in the books that the hero ever saw the president, or ever even spoke to a general in command of any army. He fought through the war, and was gradually promoted, attaining to the rank of major at the close of the struggle.

After a string of misrepresentations, Will speaks: “Well, the fellows in these books are mighty lucky, and very smart, I must say,” answered Will, surveying an illustration on the open page before him, where a small but virtuous youth is upsetting a tipsy giant in a bar-room, and under it the elegant inscription, ‘Dick Dauntless punches the head of Sam Soaker.’” This is not in any Optic book, as the critic evidently wishes her readers to believe it is, for it is in the book in Will’s hand. What book was it? The critic, on the same page, kindly gives us the means of settling this question when “Mrs. Jessie read the following paragraph from the book she had taken from Will’s hand:

“In this place we saw a tooth of John the Baptist. Ben said he could see locust and wild honey sticking to it. I couldn’t. Perhaps John used a piece of the true cross for a tooth-pick!”

This, or something like it, was taken from “Sunny Shores.” This was the book in Will’s hand, and in which he saw the bar-room illustration. Certainly Will found no such picture in it, or in any other Optic book. The mother in the story seems to be in league with the critic, for she read what is not in the book. She lied to the poor little innocent boy, who skipped this part of the story when he read it. There is nothing about using “a piece of the true cross for a tooth-pick.” The critic invented that; made it out of whole cloth. Here is the sentence about the tooth-pick, as our readers may find it on page 209 of the book: “Perhaps St. John the Baptist used a tooth-pick.” A period before and a period after the sentence, and not a word about the “true cross” in it.

Then the critic quotes a nautical paragraph, but spoils it by using the word
“have” for “haul.” The point is, that the boys don’t understand it; but the writer fails to state that this very nautical paragraph was used for a purpose, for the next one is as follows: –

“Very well,” answered the acting vice-principal; confounded, as Wainwright intended be should be, by this avalanche of nautical phraseology, not a word of which he comprehended,” &c. Neither does she state that the nautical phrases and manoeuvres are explained in the series, so that even her Will might understand them, if he is half as bright as the average boy. We wonder if the same boys will understand this, taken from “Eight Cousins:” “A bunch of folds was gathered up just below the waist behind, and a great bow rode a-top. . . . Heavy fringes, bows, puffs, ruffles, and revers finished off the dress.”

The critic mildly objects to the “nautical lingo,” which Will thinks may be all wrong; but we assure him it is nearer right than his mother is, “on any tack;” though it is not so bad as slang. Yet this story is full of slang, of the milder type; as, “A high velvet hat was cocked over one ear;” Will calls his mother “Mum;” “make a helpless guy of her;” “scuttling out of sight;” “revolve, my Hebe;” “take that chit home;” “I’ll be hanged if I do;” “extra whackers;” “broken his blessed old neck;” “gallivanting;” “‘fire away,’ said Geordie;” “click the pricks;” “the little Amazon pelting down the hill;” “when I thrash you, old Worm,” &c. We don’t believe this is any better than the “screamer,” “buster,” “bully,” and “let her rip,” and other words and phrases that are roundly condemned, though we do not consider any of them as very wicked.

Miss Alcott’s criticisms are extremely sensational, as we have shown. She seems to have deliberately misrepresented the books she writes about. Her citations indicate that she had the book in her hand from which she quoted, and we hardly think she could have made a tooth-pick out of a piece of the true cross without intending to do so. She could not have put that bar-room illustration into “Sunny Shores” without meaning to be untruthful. In a word, she has said enough to identify the Optic books, and then charged them with the faults of all the juvenile books published, her own included.

Ah, Louise, you are very smart, and you have become rich. Your success mocks that of the juvenile heroes you despise. Even the author of “Dick Dauntless” and “Sam Soaker,” whoever he may be, would not dare to write up a heroine who rose so rapidly from poverty and obscurity to riches and fame as you did; but in view of the wholesale perversion of the truth we have pointed out, we must ask you to adopt the motto you recommend for others – “Be honest and you will be happy,” instead of the one you seem to have chosen: “Be smart and you will be rich.”

The Literary World 6.4
(1 September 1875): 55.
Reprinted, with attribution and with minor emendations, in Boston Courier 52.40
(12 September 1875): 4:1.

If the elder Disraeli were living, he would find material for a paragraph on “The Quarrels of Authors” in the interchange of compliments that has just taken place between Miss L. M. Alcott and Mr. W. T. Adams (“Oliver Optic”), both popular
writers for the young. Miss Alcott embodied in a magazine story some remarks about Optic’s books, and their influence on young readers, which Mr. Adams thought were unjust and unkind. He defends his books in the last number of *Oliver Optic’s Magazine*, and administers some pointed advice to his critic. This advice is too pointed to be polite, and we resist the temptation to quote it. We believe in frank criticism; but it should come from critics, not from rival authors. If Mr. Adams had paused in the rapid course of one of his sea-stories to declare an unfavorable judgment of Miss Alcott’s books, she would very naturally have pronounced him no gentleman; and as she was the unprovoked aggressor in this case, we do not see that she has any right to complain of his prompt retaliation.


Messrs. Roberts Brothers are preparing an agreeable sensation for hosts of readers in the shape of a new book by Miss Alcott. “Eight Cousins” will be the first book in the “Little Women” series issued since “Little Men,” which was published in June, 1871, four years ago, thirty-eight thousand copies having been called for in that month. The series consists of “Little Women,” “Little Men,” and [“]An Old-Fashioned Girl,” three works without doubt the most popular of the time, their combined sale in the United States exceeding two hundred thousand, and England, France, Germany and Holland swelling the number with their respective editions. “Eight Cousins” adds another to these felicitous domestic histories which have made their author so famous, and in which girls, boys, and their parents take equal delight, and its perusal will convince all that she has lost none of her powers of fascination.


In a few days hence Messrs. Roberts Brothers will have ready a new book by Miss L. M. Alcott, entitled “Eight Cousins,” a story, of course, for children and for all older people who have young hearts. As many readers already know, the story has been appearing for the last twelve months in *St. Nicholas*, where it has attracted wide notice.

I do not purpose to give any analysis of this charming story, for as everybody reads whatever comes from Miss Alcott’s pen, so everybody might, perhaps, be tempted to find fault if I were to unveil the good things which are said and done by the young people who dwell beneath the two bright covers of the book.

I may say, however, that “Eight Cousins” adds another to that admirable series of domestic histories which has won fame for the author and made thousands of homes brighter and better. In this story Miss Alcott convinces us again that she has lost none of those powers which made
all of her former writings so attractive. She is still the same pleasing, winning, and forcible artist of home scenes and doings as ever before; she may still count a legion of admirers, and still has the full confidence of the children and their parents.

The question has often been put, Why is it that Miss Alcott has such a hold on the public? Some twenty odd years ago, while yet unknown beyond the immediate circle of her own friends, she experienced, like many another young lady well trained and educated, the *cacoethes scribendi*—the desire to write something for the amusement or the instruction of the vast public, whichever it might prove.

She ventured one day to step into the editorial office of the Boston *Saturday Evening Gazette* with a small package neatly tied up. This package contained her first manuscript story. The editor read it, admired it, and published it, and the author received for its publication her first literary compensation.

Such was the beginning of a career whose end may not be, we all hope, for many years to come. She continued to write essays, sketches, and stories, which were received and published by other journals of the day.

Her fame may be said to have been established, however, on the day when “Little Women” was given to the world. She had previously printed her “Hospital Sketches,” which, for some reason or other, fell dead from the press. They had in them every element of popularity, goodness, and success. But the author was only a school-mistress, with limited reputation, and, like most school-mistresses, her works as such were better known than herself.

Everybody knows how, when Miss Alcott presented the manuscript of “Little Women” to a former publisher in this city, it was returned to her with the fatherly admonition that she had better stick to her school-teaching and give up authorship. This puppet prophecy of the Dickens worshipper, worded somewhat indefinitely, to be sure, reads a little strange nowadays, and will read still more so, I fear, when he who gave it utterance shall have been laid to rest with some other great lights of English literature.

Fortunately, Miss Alcott is a woman of the irrepressible sort. You can grieve her heart but you cannot kill her energy. She believed that “Little Women” was as readable as thousands of other books that had been published, but she did not think that it was perfect in its way, or would yield much more than the cost of its publication.

On a lucky date she carried the manuscript to Roberts Brothers, who, after having read a few pages of it, determined at once to put it into print. Into print it went; it was published, and on the following Christmas Day she received her first check.

All the world knows what a perfect success it proved. It was sold in every State of the Union; it was devoured almost by old and young. I found a copy of it six or seven years ago in one of the log cabins of Colorado, and when I inquired how it ever came there I was told that the colporteur had left it there with the recommendation that it be read by the whole family, and then be sent to other cabins in the Territory. Like the great bright sun over our heads, it was taking its way westward from house to house bringing good cheer and comfort, and making homes happier and hearts lighter as it passed along.

And then came the “Old-Fashioned Girl” and “Little Men” and “Work,” which, with “Little Women,” are without doubt four of the most popular works of the time, their combined sale in the United States alone having already exceeded two hundred thousand copies, to say nothing
of the large sales in England, France, Germany, and Holland.

“Eight Cousins” is the latest and in many respects the best book that the author has written [written]. I shall not prophesy how large will be its sale. In June, 1871, 38,000 copies of “Little Men” were sold. So far more copies of “An Old-Fashioned Girl” have been disposed of than any of her other works. Of course then, it has proved the most popular.

If I repeat the question, Why is it that these books are so sought after? I can find no answer unless it be in the assertion that they are so brimful of homely simplicity, of domestic affection, of Christian charity, and all the kindred graces that make one heart dear to another. Her boys and girls are the boys and girls which figure around our own firesides. They are of the good, bad, and indifferent sort, and we like them because they are so much what we used to be, what our children are now, and what children will always be, if we can all have our own way in bringing them up.

And yet if you were to ask Miss Alcott which of her books she thinks of the most highly she would say “Hospital Sketches.” It was her idol, in a literary sense, when she first saw it between covers; it is her idol to-day. It is a mystery to her why this book sells so slowly, and why her other books, which she thinks little of, sell rapidly. “Why is it that people like my books?” she has often asked. She has as yet found no answer more substantial than that expressed in the hundreds of letters which she is constantly receiving from mothers everywhere – “because they are so good.” And such generous approval as this is enough to cheer any writer’s heart.

Miss Alcott has received from her writings upwards of sixty thousand dollars already; and if the days were longer she could double this sum in a very short time.

New-York Tribune

It is needless to praise the books of Louisa M. Alcott, one of the few women in America who have made a fortune out of literature. She publishes nothing – were it only the scraps from her scrap-bag – which crowds of eager readers do not rush to buy. Roberts Brothers have just ready her latest tale, entitled “Eight Cousins; or, The Aunt-Hill.” It is a bright, wide-awake, charming story, told with all Miss Alcott’s accustomed vivacity of style. It is not so good as “Little Women” – no second book will ever have quite the fresh fascination of that first one, which was like a new note in music – but it is good enough to satisfy those who look to Miss Alcott as a perennial entertainment. The character of Rose, the one girl among the cousins, is most delicately drawn – the boys are finely discriminated, too; and each of the aunts is a “character study.”

Daily Evening Traveller

Hundreds who have followed, month by month, with constant interest, Miss Alcott’s charming story of Eight Cousins as it has appeared in St. Nicholas, will welcome it complete in one volume, as issued by Messrs. Roberts Bros. Thousands more, old and young, who have learned through “Little Women,” “Little Men,” “An Old Fashioned Girl,” and other works, to love the writings of Miss Alcott, will seize upon
the new volume with avidity. They will find all the beauty and grace of the past efforts fully exemplified in *Eight Cousins*. A philanthropist could not wish for a better book to place in a young reader’s hands, nor could a young reader desire a more entertaining story. Sweet and gentle, pure and natural, it deserves to be read by every child in the land. The character of Rose is a beautiful one, and the Cousins are so lifelike that they seem to be moving and frolicking before the reader’s eyes. The boys are good, not “goody,” and their naturalness is one of Miss Alcott’s chief charms of writing. The uncles, especially Dr. Alec, will be loved no less than the young people, and the aunts will be, some loved, some not so much regarded, but all pronounced “drawn from life.” It will be a neglect well nigh unpardonable, wherever it is possible, not to carry the volume home to the young people.


Over two hundred thousand copies of the “Little Women” series have been sold in the United States alone since the first volume was published. The popularity of her books in this country and Europe shows that people do appreciate real literary merit when joined with a genuine naturalness and humanity. Miss Alcott writes up to the level of the best human nature and not down to that of the worst. She puts herself in her work, and people enjoy her works because they find such a true, natural, lovable woman in them.


“Eight Cousins, or the Aunt Hill” (Boston: Roberts Brothers), does its full share in keeping up the reputation of Miss Alcott’s books for young people. Rose is the heroine, and Uncle Alec the hero, while a host of aunts and seven boy cousins make the action of the story very rapid and full of variety. Like all Miss Alcott’s stories, this is full of suggestions for the education and the home training of children; and its moral is obedience, love, mutual helpfulness and mutual self sacrifice. The little orphan girl who came among her seven merry, noisy cousins is a perfectly new character in Miss Alcott’s company of little men and women, and as unlike the “old-fashioned girl” as possible; but under her uncle’s wise and loving training, and with some wholesome rubs from her aunts and the boys, she came out a very nice girl herself, and improved her cousins wonderfully; a debt they fully paid, however, by the good they did her. There is a great deal of play and fun in the book, and much less slang than is usually found in children’s stories; and there is the same self-respecting and honorable spirit that marks all Miss Alcott’s serious work, and makes it so good for young and old to read.


“Eight Cousins” is a story that will hardly enhance its author’s popularity. For the naturalness and brightness of her earlier
stories, it offers a vague kind of didacticism which will not prove an acceptable substitute. The heroine, Rose, is introduced at the age of eleven, or thereabouts, an orphan, and placed temporarily in charge of a nest of aunts. Presently her uncle and guardian, Dr. Alec, arrives, and undertakes her education. He is an Admira ble Crichton in the nineteenth century fashion, all-accomplished, flawless, and infallible. He finds his charge an ignorant, crude little piece of vanity, and sets to work to reform her. The author desires us to believe that this man was permitted to carry out his own ideas in training the girl without interference by the dozen or more of aunts who surrounded her. Of course he fascinates the child, who is instantly transformed into a model of amiability, good sense, and industry, who habitually sacrifices herself for the benefit of the servant-girl, and mortifies her flesh with ostentatious assiduity. At a year’s end, she emerges a highly accomplished young lady, who can skate and ride and row and read, and articulate a skeleton, and bake bread; to what remote limit of improvement she afterwards arrives will be told in a sequel, called “The Rose in Bloom.” She seems to us an improbable girl, and the educational results claimed for Dr. Alec’s system tax our credulity. The action of the story is not very lively, and none of the personages possess notable individuality or interest. Debby, the cook, we notice, changes her name without getting married, and becomes Dolly. Miss Alcott’s style has somewhat improved, but is still headlong and marred by slang. She ought not to write “pitching off of a high loft,” or “laughing so he spilt his tea.” But this new book has the striking characteristics which have given the author’s former books a fame of their own, and, if less fascinating than its predecessors, it will doubtless content the thousands of readers who esteem Miss Alcott as one of the most delightful writers of the day.

Boston Evening Transcript

Miss Alcott’s preface to the “Eight Cousins” is brief and needlessly apologetic. All will admit the existence of defects in the most carefully-prepared works, whether intended for little people or their elders, but we are inclined to think that in this, as in other stories by the author of “Little Women,” etc., those defects are so far outnumbered by excellences as to seldom attract notice. Certainly Uncle Alec’s experiment, as it appeared in its serial form in the St. Nicholas, if intended to amuse the young folks, was a most decided success, and continued popularity in its present form is assured by the eagerness with which those who followed it month after month now hasten to obtain it as completed. The secret of the great attraction of this author’s works consists in her strict adherence to the truth of nature. The “Eight Cousins,” like characters of her preceding books, are just bright, active, good-hearted children, neither preternaturally perfect nor unnaturally wicked, with the faults and follies, the good and bad qualities, incident to their age and education. They like and dislike, love and hate, fall out and make up again, like the ordinary children of every-day life, and yet through their whole story, illustrated by the conduct of the boys and girls themselves, runs a moral and a lesson not too obtrusively presented, but none the less readily seen and appreciated by the young readers for whom it is intended. Children
must all, to some extent, meet and over-
come evil, judge between the good and
the bad, choose their companions, and
their employments, and in aiding them to
do this wisely and correctly books like
those of Miss Alcott’s will render much
assistance both by precept and example.
The short preface also announces as a se-
quiel to this volume “The Rose in Bloom,”
and the author therein promises to make
amends for her seeming want of atten-
tion to “educational improvements.” We
trust that she will not strive to amend
her present style in such a way as to de-
prive her writings in the future of that
fresh young life which is one of the great-
est charms of true boy and girlhood, and
has contributed so much to the popular-
ity of her efforts in the department in lit-
erature in which she has been so signally
successful.

Dall, Caroline H. “Eight
Cousins.” The
Independent 27.1401
(7 October 1875): 9:2.

Is an author lucky or unlucky whose first
venture is a perfect success? We have of-
ten wondered; for few and far between
are those capable of more than one perfect
book, and men are seldom remembered by
the best work they have done, but rather
by that which struck and kept the public
fancy of their day. De Foe is known merely
as the author of “Robinson Crusoe.” Only
some purblind English scholar recalls now
and then the finer traits of his history of
the plague in London or the more delicate
scope of his better work. Milton found
fame – like most of us – when he lost
Paradise; and, although his efforts to
regain it were more harmonious and
thoughtful, the world passes them silently
by. The people who doubt the ability of
Shakespeare to write his own plays, and
prefer to attribute them to a man with an
itching palm, are not troubled by the finer
work and more exquisite beauty of the
Sonnets.

“Little Women” was Miss Alcott’s per-
fec success. She will be remembered by it
when we are all in our graves and unborn
generations will laugh over its tempting
pages. We do not expect her to surpass it,
and we doubt whether any future book of
hers can be as good in all respects, because
this had reality for its basis. Everybody
knows that the children were real chil-
dren and the things described actually hap-
pened. And yet in some respects her later
books are finer. Whatever defects its se-
rial form may imply in Eight Cousins, its
style is purer and the characters are more
individual than is usual with the author.
They are not seen, as very often, through
an Alcott-y haze. Mannerism in art or lit-
erature is a defect, and if a line from an
author’s pages can be immediately recog-
nized when it is not remembered his fame
is pretty sure to be a passing thing. We
have been a little afraid of this for “Aunt
Jo,” but the new book looks as if the
author meant to tread hereafter on safer
ground.

In view of the exceptional success
which Miss Alcott has had, it would do au-
thors no harm to ask themselves how and
why it has come. Readers know very well.
It is simply because her thoughts and feel-
ings are always enlisted in behalf of what
is sound and healthy in life and morals and
because sunshine and cheerfulness pervade
her pages and break alike through mists
and tears. In the troubles and perplexities
of daily life we women turn to our light
reading for faith and cheer. “Hope smiles
eternal” in the human breast; but not always in ours. We want no heavy, depressed heroines or stories with a bad ending. We want books that will stimulate our faith in human nature, show us the bright side of our own trials, refract the twilight of our experience till rainbows glow all round us, and God’s love as well as material sunshine becomes all pervasive to our consciousness. It is this which Miss Alcott’s somewhat extravagant pen does for us. It is missionary work. It is very like what Charles Dickens did, except that she seldom carries us into the company of squalor, filth, and crime, as he too often did. For it we love her, thank her, and continue to buy her books, and so will generations yet unborn. For it we love her, thank her, and continue to buy her books, and so will generations yet unborn. And Miss Alcott does this knowing very well what human life is. Her existence has not been all sunshine; and now that the full light has come to her it does not dazzle and bewilder, it only inspires.

Zion’s Herald 52.40 (7 October 1875): 314:7.

The same publishers have issued, in handsome style, the long-looked-for volume for youthful readers, promised from the pen of Louisa M. Alcott, the popular authoress of “Little Women.” It is entitled Eight Cousins; or, The Aunt-Hill, which is a name funny and expressive and characteristic enough in itself. The volume has this fine dedication: “To the many boys and girls whose letters it has been impossible to answer, this book is dedicated as a peace-offering by their friend.” They will all eagerly seize the peace-offering, making it first a “wave-offering” in their exultation. A long life this “Aunt-Hill” of cousins will have, and yet they will never grow old.

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Miss Alcott’s “Eight Cousins,” as now published in a book, makes something like 300 pages, and is intensely interesting to girls and boys, – for whom it was written. To older persons its interest consists chiefly in the light it sheds on Miss Alcott’s own mind, and modes of writing, – concerning which, the critics are still at fault. That she has much talent, is evident, – that this talent, great and active as it is, cannot be depended on for steady or sustained intellectual work of a high order also begins to be evident, – but the reason why has never been very carefully explored, nor explicitly stated. She succeeds in tales and sketches for children. She fails in novel writing, and, in both, perhaps, the cause of her success and failure are the same, – a too constant reference to certain moral rules, extremely useful to children, upon whom they cannot be too often enjoined, – but not strictly necessary in dealing with grown people, who need to have the laws of life sketched out with a bolder hand, and to live under a somewhat freer play of the attractions and the destinies than Miss Alcott will permit us. In the narrower realm of child-life, she allows freedom enough, and even attracts and stimulates her young admirers by glimpses of unconstraint and irregularity. But it is a strait and narrow path, after all, in which they must walk, – hedged in with good counsel and with
good examples, though enlivened everywhere by patches of frolic and noble sentiment, which make the didactic seem agreeable. Thus, in this story, Rose is a good girl, and never by any chance could be otherwise; even her failings lean to virtue’s side, and if any serious misfortune should overtake her, it would be resented by the reader as a piece of injustice. Her sins are all little ones, and her afflictions are manifestly contrived to bring out in a stronger light the graces of her character. To children this is very satisfactory, and to many grown people also, – and this agreeable effect is heightened by the wonderful air of sprightly reality which Miss Alcott throws about all her scenes and characters in a book of this sort. She abounds in fancy, in wit, and in a kind of humor which, without going very deep, is genuine and searching so far as it does go. There is, also, an affluence and vigor in her mind, which is almost never wanting in popular authors, – conveying to all her readers a sense of power in cheerful exercise. Nor does it appear that she is at all losing her hold on the public, but rather extending it wider with every successive year, as her books become known in all parts of the world.

Honor and praise to this enviable faculty of Miss Alcott’s! She deserves all she has received, and will receive and deserve even more. Yet one sometimes recalls, in thinking of her books, that fascinating character created by another gifted woman, George Sand, who makes it the business of his life to exhibit, in Italy and elsewhere, theaters of marionettes in which the little puppets talk and move gracefully and impressively – but never with the whole effect of living actors of larger size. There is something a little factitious about it all, – one must “make-believe very much,” as the poor little marchioness says, not to be sometimes wearied by these miniature performers. The drama of human life is something more serious than Miss Alcott has yet portrayed, though she is by no means lacking in pathos either. In style she is more correct than formerly, yet will not quite meet the demands of grammatical and rhetorical censors, of whom she also has become one, as we see by this last book. The illustrations are quite unequal in merit; some being as good as possible, and others so-so. The sequel will be called for at once, but will not be immediately published, or even begun. Probably it will appear in St Nicholas, though this is not yet certain.

The other books of fiction that accompany Miss Alcott’s cannot claim to rank above her.

The Commonwealth 14th year.6 (9 October 1875): [1]:8.

Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s *Eight Cousins, or The Aunt-Hill*, has all the excellent characteristics of her many popular stories. We hardly know of which chapters to speak most enthusiastically. Certainly all who have read her previous works will want this continuation. “Rose,” “Uncle Alec,” the boys of “The Clan,” the “Other Fellows,” and all the rest, will find cordial admirers. They are the jolliest lot one can know – in fact or fancy. The author sends out this volume as “a peace-offering” to the many boys and girls whose letters she could not answer, and yet, as though fearing this would not suffice, promises soon to give them another called “The Rose in Bloom.” What riches for the young people
now-a-days! The volume is fittingly illustrated.


A book by the author of “Little Women,” needs no recommendation. Miss Alcott is popular throughout the land, because she writes naturally, not only out of her mind, but also out of her heart. Possessing fine abilities which have been strengthened by observation and study, enriched by a generous culture, she has also a warm and joyous nature, which sympathizes with all human emotions, the wishes, hopes and fears of men, women and children, imparting to her sensible and well written books a bright and cheerful atmosphere, and giving to her attractive fictions the charm and value of truth. Let us advise our young friends to read this book about the Eight Cousins with careful attention, for it is to be followed in a short time by another book sketching the grown-up heroine, and properly entitled, “The Rose in Bloom.”


The story of Rose and her seven boy cousins is one of Miss Alcott’s happiest efforts. Though it has received eager perusal in the St. Nicholas, it will still find a very warm welcome from many young readers. It is a bright, natural, touching story, which even grown folks will find interesting.


It is sometimes affirmed by the observant foreigner, on visiting these shores, and indeed by the venturesome native, when experience has given him the power of invidious comparison, that American children are without a certain charm usually possessed by the youngsters of the Old World. The little girls are apt to be pert and shrill, the little boys to be aggressive and knowing; both the girls and boys are accused of lacking, or of having lost, the sweet, shy bloom of ideal infancy. If this is so, the philosophic mind desires to know the reason of it, and when in the course of its enquiry the philosophic mind encounters the tales of Miss Alcott, we think it will feel a momentary impulse to cry Eureka! Miss Alcott is the novelist of children – the Thackeray, the Trollope, of the nursery and the school-room. She deals with the social questions of the child-world, and, like Thackeray and Trollope, she is a satirist. She is extremely clever, and, we believe, vastly popular with infant readers. In this, her latest volume, she gives us an account of a little girl named Rose, who has seven boisterous boy-cousins, several grotesque aunts, and a big burly uncle, an honest seaman, addicted to riding a tilt at the shams of life. He finds his little niece encompassed with a great many of these, and Miss Alcott’s tale is chiefly devoted
to relating how he plucked them successively away. We find it hard to describe our impression of it without appearing to do injustice to the author’s motives. It is evidently written in very good faith, but it strikes us as a very ill-chosen sort of entertainment to set before children. It is unfortunate not only in its details, but in its general tone, in the constant ring of the style. The smart satirical tone is the last one in the world to be used in describing to children their elders and betters and the social mysteries that surround them. Miss Alcott seems to have a private understanding with the youngsters she depicts, at the expense of their pastors and masters; and her idea of friendliness to the infant generation seems to be, at the same time, to initiate them into the humorous view of them taken by their elders when the children are out of the room. In this last point Miss Alcott does not perhaps go so far as some of her fellow-chroniclers of the nursery (in whom the tendency may be called nothing less than depraved), but she goes too far, in our opinion, for childish simplicity or parental equanimity. All this is both poor entertainment and poor instruction. What children want is the objective, as the philosophers say; it is good for them to feel that the people and things around them that appeal to their respect are beautiful and powerful specimens of that they seem to be. Miss Alcott’s heroine is evidently a very subjective little girl, and certainly her history will deepen the subjective tendency in the little girls who read it. She “observes in a pensive tone” that her health is considered bad. She charms her uncle by telling him, when he intimates that she may be vain, that “she don’t think she is repulsive.” She is sure, when she has left the room, that people are talking about her; when her birthday arrives she “feels delicate about mentioning it.” Her conversation is salted with the feminine humor of the period. When she falls from her horse, she announces that “her feelings are hurt, but her bones are all safe.” She certainly reads the magazines, and perhaps even writes for them. Her uncle Alec, with his crusade against the conventionalties, is like a young lady’s hero of the “Rochester” school astray in the nursery. When he comes to see his niece he descends from her room by the water-spout; why not by a rope-ladder at once? When her aunts give her medicine, he surreptitiously replaces the pills with pellets of brown-bread, and Miss Alcott winks at the juvenile reader at the thought of how the aunts are being humbugged. Very likely many children are overdosed; but this is a poor matter to tell children stories about. When the little girl makes a long, pert, snubbing speech to one of her aunts, who has been enquiring into her studies, and this poor lady has been driven from the room, he is so tickled by what would be vulgarly called her “cheek” that he dances a polka with her in jubilation. This episode has quite spoiled, for our fancy, both the uncle and the niece. What have become of the “Rollo” books of our infancy and the delightful “Franconia” tales? If they are out of print, we strongly urge that they be republished, as an antidote to this unhappy amalgam of the novel and the story-book. These charming tales had, relatively speaking, an almost Homeric simplicity and “objectivity.” The aunts in “Rollo” were all wise and comfortable, and the nephews and nieces were never put under the necessity of teaching them their place. The child-world was not a world of questions, but of things, and though the things were common and accessible to all children, they seemed to have the glow of fairy-land upon them. But in ‘Eight Cousins’ there is no glow and no fairies; it is all prose, and to our sense rather vulgar prose.
It is not hard to discover the secret of Miss Alcott’s great popularity. Her stories are always interesting, and so full of life and buoyancy and good cheer, so brimming over with fun and frolic and healthfulness, that they come like sun-beams into a darkened room. Though nominally written for young people, we are greatly mistaken if the “old folks” don’t get quite as much real pleasure out of them as their children and grandchildren.

When the author gave us “Little Women” she touched a key that woke a ready response in the popular heart. She has been playing on that key ever since then, with slight variations, in her “Little Men,” “An Old Fashioned Girl” and “Work.” She has no wide range of character or incident – nor does she need it. Within her particular sphere she can call up so many bright shapes, throw over her scene so much light and gladness, so amuse and cheer and encourage, that no one but the most hard-hearted critic could wish her to be anything else than she is. We do not find in her stories the suggestiveness of Mrs. Whitney, nor do we look for it. We accept her Jo and Amy and Polly and Rose for what they are, and are grateful.

The “Eight Cousins” seems to us an improvement on “Work” and some of Miss Alcott’s recent publications. It is a very simple story, but is not lacking in the same kind of interest which belongs to the author’s other books. Rose is an orphan and is left to the care of a number of aunts and her guardian, Uncle Alec. Her aunts have their theories about her training, but the uncle takes Miss Rose in hand and gives her an education after his own heart – a very sensible and wise education, too, as all will admit. In the way in which Uncle Alec brings up his charge Miss Alcott doubtless introduces her own ideas of the education of girls – and mothers and those entrusted with the care of children will do well to consider whether Uncle Alec’s method is not as profitable, everything considered, as that which would have been followed by the average fashionable mother, who is represented in this story by Aunt Clara.

But let no one think that “Eight Cousins” is a didactic volume. It is full of all sorts of fun – great “larks” as Miss Alcott would express it. There is a whole host of boys to go off on frolics, and picnics and camping out and plays and sports which are introduced show that the author believes that children should have a good time. To be sure we entertain our secret doubts as to the possible existence of such a set of boys as the seven in the “clan,” but they are certainly very pleasant fellows to meet.

However, Rose is the character of the story and upon her Miss Alcott has evidently expended a good deal of thought and care. Her occasional struggles with the natural temptation to dress finely and be like other girls of her age, her little splurges of temper, her self-sacrifices when her conscience gets the better of her inclination, and her love for her uncle, even when she is somewhat afraid of him – are all very naturally described. She is not the model Sunday school book heroine, but is a very lovable little creature after all. It would seem as if many a girl reading this story would be led to try to make her self useful and helpful to others – even as Rose became to her uncle and aunts and cousins, a veritable “heart’s delight.”

This is one of the chief excellences of Miss Alcott’s books – they always show, not obtrusively, but yet most decidedly, that the happiest and best people are the
“real folks,” who are living simple, natural, earnest lives, who are above fashion’s sway and dare to be unconventional so that they can be true to themselves. In the bright, healthy atmosphere in which her people live there is no nonsense (save the right sort of nonsense), no affectation. Rose plays with her big boy cousins apparently without the shadow of a thought of “beaus” or “attention,” while the relations between Laurie and the girls in “Little Women” have seemed to us the state of feeling which ought always to exist between youth of opposite sexes. Her people get the most out of life and are happy and joyous as such people ought to be.

It would be easy to find flaws in “Eight Cousins.” It is not, perhaps, a perfect literary work. Occasionally the author repeats herself rather too much; all of her characters have a way of “prancing” and “chirping” and “dancing” which becomes a trifle monotonous. We should also say that her criticism of the works of a contemporary writer for children in the [undecipherable...we mainly agree with.?] Some such protest could well be made, but not in such a place.

But after all we have little fault to find. “Eight Cousins” is so fresh and bright and amusing and instructive – and we hope it will prove most helpful – that we welcome it with gratitude and pleasure. The children will enjoy it hugely and the “grown-ups” will possibly get a few ideas from it.

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The Athenaeum no. 2504 (23 October 1875): 539.

Miss Alcott is always welcome, not only to the boys and girls she has taken under her special patronage, but also to their elders, whom she does not seem to love nearly so much; indeed, she inverts the old nursery traditions of infallibility, and most openly and audaciously gives her verdict that children are generally in the right! This, we suppose, inclines the hearts of young readers to her. They know that in her they have a friend who understands and sympathizes with their difficulties. It is true that in her hands even naughty, tiresome children are amenable to reason and good example; but then she has the making of her own pattern parents and guardians, who seem to understand, as by some magic, how to throw light into the dark corners and crooked windings of the children’s hearts, and to find out the best way to put them to rights. Elder readers, who have to take things as they find them, and make the best of their own unwritten difficulties and unsolved problems, can at least profit by studying the spirit in which Miss Alcott works in the little allotment she has appropriated in the morning-land of childhood; and they will rejoice in the bright and cheerful view of life and its duties with which she always closes her stories, even when she has been obliged to inflict the sorrows and perplexities of its harder lessons upon her beloved little men and women as they grow up. Miss Alcott’s stories are thoroughly healthy, full of racy fun and humour, even when she is teaching some extra hard task which must be learned and accomplished. “The Eight Cousins” consist of a clan of seven boys, all of different ages and dispositions, and in different stages of what maiden aunts and old servants designate as “being rampantous.” The eighth cousin is a charming little girl, an orphan, who plays the part of fairy princess and good angel to the boys, who worship her, wonder at her, tease her, and obey her, whilst she, in her turn, under the wise guidance of “Uncle Alec,” her guardian, grows out
of a puny, sickly, over-taught little girl at a boarding-school, into a healthy, happy, sensible, and well-educated little maiden, able to hold her own and enforce respect, as well as hearty love, upon her unruly subjects. The influence for good of a gentle little mortal girl upon the rough and not by any means perfect specimens of the “superior sex” is true to life, and Miss Alcott works out the problem of woman’s real mission in its elementary state not only with tact and skill, but with advantage to the story, which is exceedingly entertaining. The boys are American boys, though they call themselves the “Clan Campbell,” and wear kilts, and dance the Highland Fling; but boy nature is much the same at the bottom all the world over. Miss Alcott’s “Uncle Alec” preaches his doctrines about female upbringing, and raises his voice and his example against the specially American defects in the education and training of girls; but the good sense can bear transfusion into English homes, for though in England we may avoid some of the errors into which America falls as regards the education of girls, we have faults enough of our own to make it possible that we may profit by Uncle Alec’s precepts and practice in matters of health and dress and useful feminine accomplishments. There is another excellence in this book. Although there are seven boy cousins, one or two of whom are quite men in their own eyes, and although there is a lovely fascinating little girl, who grows up to be a charming young lady, there is not one breath of precocious sentiment, and the frank healthy cousinly element is not disturbed by a single hint of love or lovers to come hereafter, and this we take to be an example which might be followed with great advantage in many of our own stories for the young, which are neither more nor less than diminutive and diluted novels. We can recommend ‘The Eight Cousins’ as an entertaining and healthy story.

Since “Little Women” Miss Alcott has published nothing so charming as this new book. Again she has made life in the country as full of incident, and as spirited and attractive as any slantly sensational books can be. Such volumes as this are entitled to gratitude for what they displace as well as for what they supply. This book will be read as eagerly by boys as by girls. While the seven boy cousins are true to their nature, the one girl cousin is a “Little Woman” who helps the “Little Men” to be manly, without becoming priggish or goody. We are heartily glad that Miss Alcott has returned to her best self. Sometimes we have feared that she might never find her way back to the simplicity and freshness of “Little Women”; but now she seems to have fully regained that temporarily lost paradise.

The New York Nation, a weakly critical journal, says of Miss Alcott’s last book –

“But in ‘Eight Cousins’ there is no glow and no fairies; it is all prose, and to our sense rather vulgar prose. Will the Nation put on its glasses and parse these lines? In its cynical way it says, “Miss Alcott is, we believe, vastly popular with infant readers,” and that she “seems to have a
private understanding with the young-
sters she depicts, at the expense of their
pastors and masters.”

The Nation would do well to select a
proof-reader from this army of infants and
youngsters who revel in Aunt Jo’s “vulgar
prose”; it numbers millions.

[Boston newspaper] ([October 1875?]).
Clippings File.

A little girl who had just finished Miss
Alcott’s new story, “Eight Cousins,” and
was of course full of delight, chanced to
read the criticism on the work published in
the New York Nation. She could scarcely
believe her eyes. When she put down the
paper, her criticism was simple, but severe:
“I don’t want to know the man who wrote
that.”

“Children’s Literature.”
([October–November 1875?]).
Clippings File.

There is a growing tendency to make chil-
dren’s literature interesting to grown peo-
ple and to presume that analysis and de-
lineation of child character is the proper
literature for children. The mistake is a
grave one and has its effect on the charac-
ter of children themselves. Catechism and
moral laws are not the only things too old
for children. The modern novel sticks at
no delicacy in analyzing and unfolding the
secrets of human nature, and a child who
should too early quaff at the fountain of
Thackeray or George Eliot would take on
a most offensive familiarity with the gravi-
ties of life. We have now a class of very tal-
ented writers who are writing novels about
children and offering them to children to
read. They are vastly amusing and enter-
taining to the adult mind, and so they are
coming to be to the childish, especially to
the girlish, but after all it is questionable
whether this premature study of character
has not a very oldening and sickly effect.

The other day, the New York Nation
criticised Miss Alcott [Alcott’s] “Eight
Cousins” sharply in this respect, and we
find in a Boston paper an anecdote, which,
while it is meant to refute the criticism,
confirms it precisely. “A little girl,” we
are told, read this criticism and “could
scarcely believe her eyes. When she put
down the paper, her criticism was simple,
but severe: ‘I don’t want to know the man
who wrote that.’” May the good Lord de-
 deliver us from the “little girl” who delivers
herself on points of literary criticism in this
style! Perhaps Boston is fond of this sort
of thing, but we prefer the little girl who
bolts the fairy tales in happy innocence of
the New York Nation, or her own being.

The Nation’s criticism overlooks the
fact that Miss Alcott’s little girl is meant
to be prematurely oldened by life in a
boarding-school. The first sentence of the
story displays this sickening trait: “Rose
sat all alone in the big, best parlor with
her little handkerchief laid ready to catch
the first tear, for she was thinking of her
troubles, and a shower was expected.”
Such a character is well enough to por-
tray to parents, or as a display of liter-
ary talent, but we venture to presume that
quite as much affectation is taught chil-
dren by it as by any experience to which
they are subjected at school. Rose is thir-
teen and a half, but “very small of her
age,” and her début reminds us strongly
of Thackeray’s young lady who had
“suffered” and who inscribed her griefs as “Mes Larmes.” Thackeray was dealing with a girl of the love-making age, and he shows up her affectation so as to make it hateful. The children of the English novelists are sturdy, beef-eating little mortals, not given to introspection and not introduced as retiring to vacant parlors and spreading their handkerchiefs, like tablecloths, for a delectable banquet of tears. Nor is this a common quality of American children, and, if it were, it would scarcely be proper for their own contemplation, however much its portrayal might interest their parents and improve domestic discipline. The precocity of Rose is nothing to the organized precocity of Miss Alcott’s boys. But Miss Alcott, “Susan Coolidge” and others constitute a class. Their literature is really so delightful that it seems ungrateful to protest against it, – but until we insist on schooling children in Beethoven and Shakespeare and keeping them at table through all the courses and wines, we must certainly recognize some limit to their conscious study of their little selves.

The Overland Monthly
15.5 (November 1875): 493–94.

Miss Alcott has fairly won the title of “The Children’s Friend,” and she will lose nothing of former prestige in the chatty volume before us, dedicated “To the many boys and girls whose letters it has been impossible to answer,” and to whom she would now make a peace-offering. The fact of the work having first appeared serially will not decrease its popularity, for, like the author’s previous works, it carries its own recommendation with it. There are the same vigor, discrimination, character-portraiture, and racy dialogue that characterize all her writings. It is no mean artist who can group with consummate skill a score or more of prominent figures, and still bring his hero or heroine into bold relief, at the same time preserving the distinct individuality of every leading character. This Miss Alcott achieves with rare genius and ability. She marshals her battalion of uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, and nieces with the dexterity of a commanding general, and every one of them steps forth with military precision at the word of command. It would be quite impossible to mistake the beautiful and meek Aunt Peace, with hair as white as snow and cheeks that never bloomed, but ever cheerful, busy, and full of interest in all that went on in the family, especially the joys and sorrows of the young girls growing up about her, to whom she was adviser, confidante, and friend in all their tender trials and delights. Equally impossible would it be to fail to discern instantly the striking individuality of Aunt Plenty – the stout brisk old lady, with a sharp eye, a lively tongue, and a face like a winter-apple, always trotting, chatting, and bustling amid a great commotion of “stiff loops of purple ribbon that bristled all over her cap, like crocus-buds.”

In character analysis, Miss Alcott shows herself the true artist. She is also most skillful in the construction of her plot, if, indeed, she can be said to lay out a plot; for plots too often have a well-rounded completeness that suggests unreality, whereas Miss Alcott’s stories are too life-like to have smooth sailing throughout the voyage; nor must the reader expect everything to come out “just right,” as the world would have it.

The heroine of the story before us, little Rose – a delicate, sensitive, fastidious child, with much good common-sense and generous gifts of mind and heart – is left
an orphan at an early age, and turned over to the tender mercies of a bevy of aunts, uncles, and cousins, who pass critical judgment upon the “morbid, spoilt girl, so plainly marked for the tomb.” But Rose herself has no predisposition in favor of early death, and with keen womanly instinct betakes herself to the sheltering fondness of sensible Uncle Alec, and on the wings of his gentle counsel she mounts toward sunnier skies. Uncle Alec is in strong contrast with Uncle Enos, to whose tender mercies Christie was consigned, in Miss Alcott’s wholesome and able story, Work. Whether Rose is to develop any of those fine qualities of womanly character evinced by Christie in the manifold vicissitudes through which she passed before she found her David only to lose him again, the ingenious authoress leaves us to guess, only promising to divulge the secret in a forthcoming volume, whose advent will be hailed with ill-concealed curiosity and interest.

We catch a momentary glimpse of some of the strong points of Rose’s character in her occasional outbursts toward some pet aversion in the way of a playmate, as, for instance, Ariadne Blish, who was picked out as the model child of the neighborhood to come and play with her, but whom Rose declared to be so perfectly horrid that she could not bear the sight of her, and said “she was so like a wax doll that she longed to give her a pinch and see if she would squeak.”

Phebe, the girl from the poor-house, evokes the keenest interest, and the real character of the heroine Rose is best displayed by her treatment of and interest in this hapless but happy child, “whose heart was so full of content that it overflowed in music, . . . [remainder of sentence and next omitted].”

The sequel to this interesting and delicious little story will be eagerly looked for by the many admirers of this gifted author, who is always welcomed not only by the children in short-clothes, but by the “children of a larger growth” as well.

**Appletons’ Journal 14.346 (6 November 1875): 601.**

We find abundant evidence in “Eight Cousins; or, the Aunt-Hill” (Boston: Roberts Brothers), of one thing at least, and that is, that Miss Alcott’s hand has lost nothing of its cunning. Nor does her rollicking vivacity show sign of abatement. There is as much rushing, and running, and flying, and whooping, and yelling, and promiscuous riot and confusion, in the present work as in any of its predecessors; and we feel after finishing it rather as if we had been engaged in a prolonged romp than in the sober occupation of reading a book. The story is of a little orphan-girl of thirteen, who, by long confinement with an invalid father, and subsequently by the injudicious coddling of sundry aunts, had been brought to a condition in which she was nervous, depressed, morbid, with “no constitution,” and, as Aunt Myra defined it, “plainly marked for the tomb.” To her, at an opportune moment, returns her sailor uncle and guardian, one of those all-accomplished, all-wise persons often met with (in books), who can teach physiology, explain the structure of the eye, expound moral philosophy, beat the parson at practical theology, scale the porch by going hand over hand up one of the pillars, descend from the second story by the water-spout, ride like an Indian, swim like a dolphin, and row like a man-o’-war’s-man. This wonder resolved first to put strength into the girl’s body; and his regimen was, early rising, fresh milk, a loose belt, easy shoes, running, rowing, swimming,
riding, skating, and participation with her seven boy-cousins in all the innocent amusements of childhood. The end of the year finds her healthy and happy, expert in all the invigorating sports of youth, and receiving her first initiation, under the competent hands of Aunt Plenty, into the mysteries of those lost arts, cookery and house-keeping.

It might legitimately be complained of Miss Alcott's stories that they tend to stimulate that pert "smartness" and self-assertion which are perhaps the most offensive characteristics of American children; but they are so much more wholesome, natural, and artistic, than the stuff for which they are offered as a substitute, that it would be little less than ungrateful to insist upon their faults. We wonder, by-the-way, if Miss Alcott realizes the risk she runs in deviating from her own proper field of story-telling and "dropping into" criticism? She devotes a couple of pages of "Eight Cousins" to denouncing the methods of her co-workers, and disrespectfully characterizes certain well-known ornaments of current literature as "optical delusions." It is fortunate for her peace of mind, perhaps, that she has put the Atlantic between her and that din of warfare the first notes of which, as we understand, have already sounded.

An entertaining volume for youthful readers, and one which conveys many useful lessons. The same charming freshness which won for Little Women its wide reputation will render this volume a favorite, notwithstanding its defects – one of which is a spirit of self-assertion in the heroine which is only too true to nature in the average American girl. However reluctant we may be to acknowledge the fact, we cannot fail to see that our so-called progress has had a tendency to weaken veneration for age and respect for authority. Miss Alcott shows her sympathy with this fault by sometimes placing age in a ludicrous light before her juvenile readers. The young people of this generation do not need any encouragement in the belief that age does not always bring wisdom, and we the more regret this mistake in a book otherwise commendable. Destroy the confidence and veneration with which childhood looks up to those placed over it, and you rob parents of that which constitutes a great charm in their offspring, and go far to break down the chief bulwark of society – the family.

Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine 91.546 (December 1875): 570.

Miss Alcott's style is so pleasant and easy, and her book runs on with such an even flow of interest, that we prophesy for her new book many hundreds of readers. She tells how a little orphan was introduced into a healthy, happy family circle, and how she grew to be herself as healthy and happy as her new-found cousins. Perhaps the boys of the aunt-hill are a little too good for real life, and their talk does not always strike us as "the real thing;" but there is so much that is good and bright in the story that we can pass over such trifles. We wish all children's books were as healthy in tone as this.
This is the title of a charming book for young people – and old people with young hearts – recently written by Louisa M. Alcott. Her name is a sufficient guarantee for its being well written; but besides this, it is reformatory in its character, and directly in the interest of Health Reform, as will be seen by the review of it in this number, written by Mrs. Laura E. Lyman.

Miss Alcott’s books are always welcome, and this is a particularly healthy and vigorous one, telling how a delicate and fanciful little girl, who was in danger of being ruined by her aunts, was saved by the judicious interference of an uncle and eight boy-cousins, who encouraged in her a taste for active pursuits, and showed her that to be useful and self-forgetful was the best means of securing health and happiness.

This is a pleasant story of a delicate little orphan girl with six aunts, each bent upon carrying out some injurious system of education, of her own. There is the stern aunt who would confine her to a boarding-school and subject her to hard work and hard study. There is the over-indulgent aunt who would do nothing but pet her. There is the fashionable aunt who would make a fine lady of her. There is the melancholy aunt, under whose influence she bids fair to become a nervous hypochondriac. From all these dangers she is rescued by her uncle and guardian, a stout, warm-hearted sensible doctor; and by healthful association with eight bouncing boys, her cousins, upon whom her gentle ways in return exert a beneficial influence.

The story is told in the graphic and lively manner that has made Miss Alcott so deservedly popular with the young, and with that general vein of good sense which has met with wide approval from their parents and guardians. It is quite as good in its way as “Little Women” only there is not so much of it. It is better than the “Old-Fashioned Girl.” And this is praise enough for one book. It is well illustrated and will be eagerly sought by the great army of little people who have had so much pleasure and profit from Miss Alcott’s books.
title are Aunt Plenty, a pleasant, kind-hearted housekeeper; Aunt Peace, who was crossed in love when young, and has been “fading slowly,” to use Miss Alcott’s phrase, for thirty years; Aunt Jane, who is morose and severe; Aunt Myra, who is always talking medicine; Aunt Clara, a fashionable dame, and Aunt Jessie, a pleasant, lovable, little matron. Rose’s father having died, she is left to the guardianship of her bachelor uncle, Dr. Alec, who manages by careful and sensible training to rear a sensitive, nervous child into a strong and bright young woman, who can cook and sew with her aunts, and ride and row and run with her cousins, while being very gentle and dutiful to her uncle, and bestowing good advice upon her cousins. In one of the conversations in the story Miss Alcott causes Aunt Jessie to say that stories for boys should be

“Lively, natural and helpful – . . . [remainder of sentence omitted].”

The standard set by the good lady is not so high that authors need despair of attaining it, but is it reached in a book in which boys “sheer off” instead of walking away; in which they “fire off” questions, “mull over the fire,” “prance around” a room, “tear after” girls, and “cut in” to conversations? After a boy has been incited to a more eager study of grammar by the example of Miss Rose, as set forth on page 86, will it be “helpful” for him to find a remark about the “four first rules of arithmetic” on page 89? Will the Uncle Alec’s “lively and natural” remark, “You may come down on my grammar, manners and words as often as you think I’m wrong, and I’ll thank you,” console the youngster for such a fall from grace as that? It is much to be feared that he will not notice it, but will insert the phrase in his vocabulary, and heartily “come down” on all who do not agree with him in admiring Miss Alcott’s books, for in spite of their English, her stories will be popular because they are lively, not natural, and therefore helpful.

The greatest trouble that haunts the soul of a child is the feeling of his own helplessness. Grown persons can come and go at will but he must always say “May I?” must always feel that he is guided and led. In later years he may sigh for the days when tender hands lifted all burdens of responsibility from his shoulders, and decided whither he should turn his steps in the journey of life, but there are many hours when the child feels utterly hopeless because absolutely helpless. Little things that a touch from mamma would set right go wrong, and he can do nothing; he is misunderstood, thwarted, unappreciated, and can only mutter in baby wrath, “Wait until I am a man.” Miss Alcott’s boys and girls are always fortunate and happy; if poor, they have a gift of “garring auld claithes look a’ maist as well’s the new;” if rich, they find charming ways of spending their money. They walk into stranger’s houses as coolly as the little girl in the story of “The Three Bears,” and are cordially requested to make themselves at home. They defy their teachers and have the sweet triumph of leaving school the next day. They have parents who will allow them to play with fire, and make mud pies, and maintain a regiment of dolls, and break all the domestic rules and regulations at will. These little stories of New England children are fairy tales in which all the Cinderellas have a dozen godmothers, and all the boys have a score of Aladdin’s lamps newly burnished and fitted with patent chimneys that never break. The youthful reader sees these boys and girls triumphant and happy and forgets his own trouble, in seeing how proudly they overcome any obstacles that lie in their way; if he should try to imitate them he would probably come to grief, but
he would like the next book none the less, but would find it helpful because it would divert him and give him strength to renew his baby battles, feeling that perhaps he might conquer like the mimic heroes of whom he had read. A book of this kind is not so artistic as those in which the characters are more true to life; but few children appreciate the beauty of these unadorned pictures, and can only be induced to contemplate those in which the proportions of the figures are slightly exaggerated. Had Thackeray been as true to life in “The Rose and The Ring” as in the “Newcomes” how many children would have read ten pages of the book? If the “Eight Cousins” were as artistic as “Middlemarch,” would not the greater part of the large edition printed remain upon the shelves of the publisher? One may protest against the nature of children, but it will not change, and all the boys and girls who know Joe and Amy and their children will not rest until they have made the acquaintance of all the cousins, aunts and uncles in this book.

Miss Alcott always writes with great truth and naturalness; and notwithstanding occasional Yankeeisms, is so refined, and brings out her lessons with such studied regard to consistency, that we do not hesitate to say that there are few of our own writers for children who will be more warmly welcomed, or more reluctantly parted with. The party of aunts and great-aunts here are very vividly contrasted with each other, as are the seven boys of the various families, and Rosa, who forms the eighth cousin. Her care for Mack, the book-worm, in the midst of his threatened blindness; her patience and her powerful influence are very well pictured to us; as well as her kindness to that little servant-girl, erewhile workhouse child, Phoebe. There is just enough of innocent humour in the book to carry youngsters pleasantly forward, and, indeed, the old folks will gladly go with them, if we do not greatly mistake.


Eclectic Magazine n.s. 23.1 (January 1876): 122.

Miss Alcott presents the rare example of an author who is successful, who produces rapidly, and who yet maintains the quality of her work. “Eight Cousins” shows no falling off from “Little Women,” and is, in fact, an excellent companion-piece to that popular book. Like all Miss Alcott’s stories, it would probably torture the feelings of precise, sentimental, or “nervous” persons, whether young or old. It reproduces the sports, the romping, the noise and confusion of genuine boys’ and girls’ play; but the fun is always genuine and innocent, and the prevailing tone among the playmates is one of hearty and unaffected comradeship. Miss Alcott instils no nonsense into her readers. On the contrary, her influence is healthful and breezy. Her boys and girls may have rather too much of American “smartness” and self-assertion, but they are never “missy,” or self-conscious, or precociously sentimental.

“Eight Cousins” relates how a young “miss” of fourteen, sick mentally and
physically from over-coddling, was converted into a healthy, wholesome, and happy girl by the wise influence of a sailor uncle and guardian. His regimen consisted simply of the dress, food, habits, and amusements appropriate to childhood; and the enjoyableness of the process, and the completeness of its success, will doubtless tempt other parents and children to try the same tonic.


Miss Alcott’s *Eight Cousins; or, the Ant-Hill [Aunt-Hill]*, is better reading for the aunts than the cousins. Excessive reverence for their elders is not one of the faults of modern juveniles.

Helmke, Anna. Excerpt from Letter. *St. Nicholas* 3.3 (January 1876): 204–05.

We were all greatly interested in “Eight Cousins.” Rose’s “learning bones” reminds me of one of our studies at school. A physician comes into one of the higher classes once a week, and speaks of the construction of the human body, and of its various parts. He brings bones and pictures along to make it more easy for us to understand.

*St. Nicholas* 3.3 (January 1876): 203.

*Eight Cousins*, now published in book form by Roberts Bros., Boston, met with such a cordial reception in *St. Nicholas*, that it must become one of Miss Alcott’s most popular books. Everywhere, the children, the girls especially, take the greatest interest in Rose. Each of her seven cousins has his admirers, to be sure, and there are people who almost worship Uncle Alec, but Rose is the queen of the story. We think, too, that “Jo” of “Little Women” will have a powerful rival in this delightful young girl, who is as pretty as she is good, and who is so very good. These stories of Mr. Trowbridge and Miss Alcott have gone side by side through *St. Nicholas*, and now that they have separated and passed out into the wide world, we wish them the best of good fortune.

*The Sunday-School Times* 18.2 (8 January 1876): 27.

By this latest volume of Miss Alcott we are confirmed in our opinion of the remarkable talent this lady possesses for charming the young folk, while almost equally interesting the older ones, who opening her pages at the beginning must needs follow them to the end. Miss Alcott pleads bravely herein for the greater freedom of girls in matters of education and dress, her convictions thereabout being so happily interwoven with the thread of her story that the hobby we are riding with her is almost lost sight of, in the breezy canter we
enjoy through a succession of chapters, to which seven boys, the cousins of the heroine, give a fresh flavor of out-door life. In accomplishment of such reformatory purpose, the orphan, Rose, is resigned to the tutelage of a bachelor-uncle. No rose of summer, or fairest product of the greenhouse, was ever more carefully tended, or anxiously watched by loving eyes; indeed, until Uncle Alec assumed actively his role of guardian, there was great danger of this over-carefulness, divided between, and multiplied by, the half-dozen aunts of “Aunt-hill,” consigning the dainty blossom to a premature grave. But Uncle Alec, while he encompassed his little ward with kindness enough to spoil anything human, less genuinely good and true, put her at the same time upon a wholesome diet of oatmeal, milk, and pure air – loosening her belt, lowering her heels, and simplifying her bonnet – until the book closes upon a healthy Rose, ready to supply material, bright and fragrant, for a sequel, that Miss Alcott promises in a forthcoming volume, to be called The Rose in Bloom. Not second in interest, to Rose, is Phebe, a sweet-singing girl from the poor-house, whom Rose, in a manner truly pathetic, adopts as her sister; and whom we shall look in the second volume to see made the grateful and loving bride of no less a personage than Uncle Alec. For Uncle Alec, after all, is only some twenty-five years the senior of Phebe and wonderfully young and buoyant, even for forty. But in such natural writing as Miss Alcott’s we can predict issues with as little certainty as in everyday life. So we will wait and see. Meanwhile we would suggest that the province of a continuously-famed writer is to attend to every minutest detail as well as to the more salient points of fiction or history; and that we do not like the carelessness by which “Debby,” the cook’s name in the first chapter, becomes “Dolly” in the ninth, and continues “Dolly” to the close of the book. Perhaps, though, like Saul, who became Paul when regenerated, Debby, not very amiable in the opening scene – a very persecutor of little Christians – may later have been found worthy of a new name. Still, there is a vagueness about it that somewhat reminds us of Joaquin Miller’s mixing up of bride and daughter in his “Ship of the Desert.” Neither do we like the questioning which of necessity arises from Pokey being represented on page 63 as a “fourteen year old little girl” who is evidently a toddling wee thing. But these and other such slight faults will by most be overlooked in consideration of the author’s preface, wherein the critic is in a measure disarmed by the reminder that the writer is “quite aware of the defects of this little story, many of which were unavoidable as it first appeared serially.” Notwithstanding this, when we have a gem we look to see it flawless. So much by the way of fault-finding. In due praise we have need to say no more than that the book is written by our most popular story-teller for the young; and that no other child’s book of the season will, judging by the past, anything like equal this in sale.


I have read the “Eight Cousins,” and am delighted with it, and would like very much to follow Rose in her daily joys and trials, and also watch Miss Phebe’s progress as she mounts the ladder step by step, gaining knowledge with each, until at last she stands at the top, a true, noble, and intellectual woman.
There is commonly this pleasure, at least, in reading American books for children, that they are apt to have more of local coloring than is usually found in American novels. To some of our best novelists an American village yields nothing that is not tiresome or distasteful; it is of use only as a foil for the supposed picturesque-ness of European life. But in almost every child’s story, when the scene is laid in New England, for instance, the home life becomes essentially enjoyable; the sun shines, the brook runs, the bobolink and oriole sing, the chestnuts drop from the tree, the ice resounds, the snow sparkles, and the children and grandchildren all go to the homestead at Thanksgiving. We can hardly recall a recent children’s book produced in this country, which is wanting in local coloring, or prefers foreign traditions to American. Among our novelists of matuer life, it is needless to say that such a preference is very common.

It must be owned, however, that up to this time a certain literary crudeness or willfulness has marked this indigenous school of children’s stories. Of those who have sinned in this way, it has latterly been the custom to reproach Miss Alcott as the chief offender. She has not, however, sinned so far, even at her worst, as to reach that “I don’t know as,” or “I walked some,” which are our nearest approach to the English h, as marking the line where culture is clearly deficient. And it may be said that her last book shows a decided improvement in accuracy of language since the “worried Amy most to death,” and the “ma amie” of “Little Women.” She is unquestionably one of the few women who can make not merely small children but even college Sophomores talk with something of the raciness of real life; and to one who can do this, much may be forgiven. The trouble is, that this perilous facility has tempted her to conform her own narrative style to that of her interlocutors, and this has sometimes compelled careful parents to keep her books from their children, for fear of spoiling their vocabulary. But she has suffered severely for this among the critics, so that, like her own Jo, she must sometimes have been puzzled to know whether she had “written a promising book or broken all the Ten Commandments.” It is rather unfortunate that in the present volume she has employed this very charge of undesirable language against one of her rivals in popularity, “Oliver Optic,” and has assailed him for teaching slang as eagerly as ever a “hazed” Freshman retaliated upon Freshmen when he became a Sophomore.

Miss Alcott has been so especially condemned in England on this score, that it almost becomes necessary that her fellow-countrymen should make her cause a matter for international protest. For much of the criticism is based on that extraordinary theory of our British cousins, that it is they alone who are entitled, as Parson Hugh says, “to make fritters of English.” One would think that a child a hundred years old might be entitled to some voice in arranging his own vocabulary; but the theory seems still to prevail in some quarters, that all new Americanisms, however indispensable, are slang, and all new Anglicisms, however uncouth, are classic. A good anecdote has lately crossed the ocean, of an American girl who was playing croquet in England last summer. “What a horrid scratch!” said she indignantly, when her mallet once failed of its duty and she missed her shot. “Oh, my
dear!” said an English cousin, “you should not use such slang expressions.” “What should I have said?” asked the American. “You might have said,” replied the English maiden, after canvassing her vocabulary for a perfectly unexceptionable phrase – “you might have said, ‘What a beastly fluke!’”

In turning from Miss Alcott’s books to the most approved and decorous English stories for children, one is sometimes reminded of this piquant anecdote. Here, for instance, is a tale, much praised by the critics, and written by a lady bearing the stately name of Juliana Horatia Ewing. Opening it at the very first sentence, we find the following: “Eleanor and I are subject to fads; indeed, it is a family failing. * * * * Our fads and the boys’ fads are sometimes the same, but oftener distinct.”

Here is an absurd little monosyllable that no American who has not stayed some time in England can possibly comprehend, unless he hunts up a “slang dictionary,” and finds that it means “a hobby, a favorite pursuit.” Yet Miss Ewing vouchsafes not a word of explanation, but only closes the book with saying: “This dusty relic of an old fad had been lying by me for more than a year,” etc., etc. Suppose “fad” to have been a bit of American nonsense used by Miss Alcott, and imagine the dismay of “The Athenaeum” and “The Saturday Review!”

We dwell on all this because it is a point on which a grown-up critic is qualified to form some judgment of a book for children. But as for the absolute attractiveness of such a book, the children and the bookseller’s accounts must settle that. If you wish to know whether the cherries are good, ask the boys and the blackbirds.

Aided by one of the most skillful of American publishers, Miss Alcott’s books have long since reached a pitch of success which settles that part of the story. Yet she should remember that even a success like this will not bear to be trifled with. She herself is hardly more popular than was Mayne Reid in his day, but the children themselves seem to have forgotten his existence, and they may not always be loyal to her. There are, doubtless, laws of literary art in this department of literature as in every other, and the distinction between the transient and the permanent exists here also.

It would seem, for instance, that even in children’s books the individuality of the characters delineated might be of some importance. The four sisters in “Little Women” retain their separate characters from beginning to end; but eight cousins are too many to handle; there are really only three or four distinct individualities among them, and the rest are lay figures. Uncle Alec fluctuates in character and manners through the book very much as he does in the illustrations, where he now appears as a bearded young sailor, and again, within twenty pages, as a bald middle-aged Pickwick, with a beardless double chin. The aunts, also, are too numerous to be very clearly individualized; and, finally, Rose is placed, by the necessity of the case, at a rather chaotic period of life and in a very uncertain phase of development, and acts accordingly. The moral of the book lies, to be sure, in her physical and mental progress, and part of this progress comes to her through the mistakes of her elders; still it is possible that the follies of the various aunts are criticised too much from the grown-up point of view; and it is rather perilous moralizing to point it out as a general truth, that the most judicious uncle will end in giving a pretty niece a set of ear-rings, if she will only get her ears bored on the sly.

It would be easy to point out other defects in this little book. But, after all is said and done, it is written in the interest of the right side – of truth, honesty, and good sense. Children brought up in the atmosphere of Miss Alcott’s writings may be
tempted to grow odd and pert, and may fancy themselves wiser than their aunts and uncles, but they never will be frivolous fine ladies, or selfish worldlings. She keeps much higher laws than she breaks, and this is one secret of her power. The same is true of Miss Woolsey (Susan Coolidge), in whom the practical tendency is not so predominant as in Miss Alcott, while the artistic sense is stronger; and though it is not strong enough even in Miss Woolsey to make her always work slowly and carefully, it yet keeps her to a higher standard of taste. She is less tempted to be slashing and inelegant; her little people are better bred than Miss Alcott’s, but a shade more artificial; sometimes they use English phrases instead of American, as where little Lota Bird says: “Whatever I shall do with all of you on my hands at once, I can’t imagine.” On the other hand, the graceful and original fancies of the “Nine Little Goslings” would have been wholly out of Miss Alcott’s line, though they are thoroughly in character for her who wrote “The New Year’s Bargain.” ... Sharing the deserved popularity of Miss Alcott, [Miss Woolsey] shares also her ill-luck in respect of illustrations. It would be difficult to say which of the two books is encumbered with the poorer set of pictures.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

Helmke, Anna. Letter. St. Nicholas 2.8 (June 1875): 517.


The Overland Monthly 15.5 (November 1875): 496.

The Bookseller no. 216 (5 November 1875): 1028.


The Atlantic Monthly 37.219 (January 1876): 123.

The Ladies’ Repository [Cincinnati] 36.2 (February 1876): 185.


SILVER PITCHERS; AND INDEPENDENCE, A CENTENNIAL LOVE STORY (1876)
Miss Alcott’s “Silver Pitchers” is a temperance tale, and gives its name to a collection of nine short stories, most of them showing how people can keep and influence each other for good, and all of them having for a moral the sweetness and nobleness of love. “Transcendental Wild Oats” is by far the most important thing in the volume. It is a record of one of the earliest New England attempts at communistic life, the endeavor to “initiate a family in harmony with the primitive instincts of man.” It is strange, absurd, comic and pathetic. The transcendental men were selfish and foolish; the burden of the utterly false life fell upon one noble woman, who bore all burdens bravely. Miss Alcott describes her as “an energetic-looking woman, with a benevolent brow, satirical mouth, and eyes brimful of hope and courage.” The story is told with a similar combination of benevolence[,] satire and courage. The new Centennial story “Independence,” might have been written by anybody; it does not show a trace of Miss Alcott.

Not from any desire to “puff” the book; but because we cannot do a better service in the interest of wholesome literature and public morals, we commend to our readers’ careful perusal Miss Alcott’s “Silver Pitchers.” It is a story with a moral, a moral often hinted at in press, pulpit and private conversation, but never so aptly pointed before. It is a story of three girls, “the sweet P’s,” who set about a great work in a quiet, womanly way, and accomplished it. There are plenty of just such “sweet P’s” in every city, town and village in the land, and if they would but dare to do what they know is the right, if they would but lay to heart the moral of the “Silver Pitchers,” the community would be better and happier, and a great load of sorrow would be lifted from many a household.

“Silver Pitchers and other Stories” is the title of Miss Alcott’s new book, which is a combination of love-stories, tales for children, with “Transcendental Wild Oats,” which is not to be classified, thrown in. “Silver Pitchers” is an account of a temperance reform movement conceived and carried out by three young girls. The agency is the sentiment known as love, and the formula is: “Dear Ned, if you drink any more, I won’t let you go home with me.” The movement was successful. “Anna’s Whim” treats of life at a watering-place, – that is, the life of a young woman and a young man. The former had grown weary of adulation and gayety, and desired to lead a worthier life. The youth, whom she had known in childhood, arrives, and the two mutually educate one another. “Transcendental Wild Oats” is evidently a paraphrase of “The History of the Brook Farm Enterprise,” and doleful enough it is. There are half a dozen other stories in the
author’s peculiar style. In “Anna’s Whim” there is much philosophy. “Women,” says the wise Anna, “have no hope but to be married, and that is soon told; no ideas but dress and show, and I’m tired to death of both; no ambition but to outshine their neighbors, and I despise that.” So Anna abandoned her frivolities, and “sat erect upon a hard rock and read Buckle, Mill, and Social Science Reports with a diligence that appalled the dawdlers who usually helped her kill time.” Frank, the lover, quotes inaccurately “put my fortune to the touch, and win or lose it all.” These stories, though inferior to the author’s earlier writings, will be found pleasant summer reading.

Daily Evening Traveller

Louisa Alcott’s new book is called “Little Pitcher,” and we’ll bet (says the Cincinnati Times) any smart four-year-old can “bat it all over the field.”

Boston Evening Transcript
49.15,069 (6 June 1876): 6:1.

Miss Alcott’s “Silver Pitchers” we have already briefly alluded to in our editorial columns. It is a charming book from the first page to the last, and the fact that the larger part of it has appeared before in another form does not lessen that charm in the least. “Letty’s Tramp,” “Scarlet Stockings,” “By the River,” and “Transcendental Wild Oats” have done noble service in weekly newspapers throughout the country, and will probably take a fresh start, now that editors have fresh copies, and make the rounds of the press afresh. One story, perhaps the best in the book, “Independence,” is here presented new to the reader. It is, like ten thousand other things beside stories which are produced the present year, “centennial.” That is, the plot is made to hinge on centennial affairs. The heroine is a Miss Dolly Quincy, a descendant of Dorothy Quincy, and therefore of the bluest blood of New England. She has her home in Salem or some other decayed aristocratic suburb—with a shrill-tongued step-mother, who has no reverence for blood or centennial relics, or family heirlooms, because, as Miss Dolly puts it, “her maiden name was Smith.” Now it so happens that Dolly is very proud of her ancestry, and prouder still of some ancient furniture and a big trunkful of “relics” which has been handed down to her, and which includes, among other things, a chair in which Washington once sat, a mug from which he drank cider, a stock worn by Governor Hancock, and Mme. Hancock’s wedding ring. John Hancock Harris, an artist for an illustrated paper, who is mousing about among the old-time localities of New England to find subjects of interest for his pencil in connection with the “relic mania,” is attracted to the suburb aforesaid by the fame of Miss Dolly’s chair and mug, and calls at the house to ask permission to sketch them. The reader already anticipates the result of the visit. The two fall rabidly in love with each other, although neither of them appreciates the fact until afterward. The next meeting is on board a railway car on the way to Boston, whither Dolly is going with her relics to take part in a centennial fair, which is to end with a fancy dress ball. She stops with a gorgon aunt, who is determined to marry her to a very disagreeable
but respectable retired grocery man, Mr. Aaron Barker. The story of their course of true love, which like that of all others did n’t run smooth, is very amusingly told. We should like to quote from it, but it is one of those stories which cannot be quoted from; if you take a part, you must the whole. Suffice it to say, the obstacles in the way are all surmounted. Dolly’s aunt packs her away home in despair and anger, but instead of going home, the devoted John Hancock Harris meets her at the station as agreed beforehand, the horses’ heads are turned churchward, the twain made one, and Dolly Harris’s “relics” – such of them as will answer – are utilized for housekeeping and furnishing purposes.


Under the title of Silver Pitchers and Independence, nine as charming and graceful, as hearty, natural and beautiful short stories as we have seen grouped together, have been issued from the pen of Louisa M. Alcott. We have read each in turn thinking it better than its predecessor, and then have turned back to glance once more over sweet and homelike descriptions that caught quick hold upon our heart while reading. It is a matchless power Miss Alcott has to write tenderly and naturally, to never overload her stories with sentiment and yet to put enough in the tales to make them true to the better living. One seldom turns from a story she has written without feeling a like sensation to that which comes from a warm hand grasp and a certain assurance that we have some about us worthy to be called friends. Her stories better life and make to open before the reader, paths whose treading leads to happy scenes and wholesome incidents. With one exception these stories deal with the tender passion, and in that exception there is earnest, honest, loving too. “Silver Pitchers” is a temperance tale of great beauty, and “Independence,” is a love story of to-day, which will captivate a young or old reader. In the “Romance of a Summer Day” are gathered a half-dozen incidents which show how many-sided is that sentiment which rules and “makes the world go round,” and in “Letty’s Tramp” and “Scarlet Stockings,” two other tales of the sweetest import, are told. Happy is the reader who finds himself in possession of such a volume as this, on a quiet afternoon, for the evening will come on while the mind is filled with good impulses, and a stronger confidence in the belief that there are things worth living for here. To have written these stories must give a justifiable pride to the author, and to follow them through a deep cause for thankfulfulness to the readers.


Miss Alcott’s new book is not a novel, nor is it all new. It is composed of nine stories of moderate length, of course for the regular novel-reader; and not for the younger admirers of “Little Women,” which everybody, old and young, admires as a matter of course. With some of these nine delightful stories our readers have already become acquainted in the columns of this journal. Miss Alcott has never written anything more pleasant than “Transcendental Wild Oats[”] (less a story than a clever historical picture), “Letty’s Tramp,” “The Romance of a Summer Day,” or
“Independence.” To so lively, so sparkling, so cheery, and so altogether unattackable a writer as Miss Alcott the public, and especially the summer public, is under a great debt.


They both [also Coolidge’s For Summer Afternoons] comprise short stories, originally written for various periodicals, with some few exceptions, and now for the first time given in book form. Both authors long since made their reputations, and anything from their pens can be read but with pleasure. “Silver Pitchers,” the initial story of Miss Alcott’s volume, is in several chapters, and tells of what three young girls, Portia, Pris and Polly, did for temperance, each in her own quiet way, and is enough to make every young girl feel who reads it that she, too, would like to do something for the cause. The book contains one other story of several chapters called “Independence: A Centennial Love-Story,” and a number of those charming little stories which Miss Alcott knows so well how to write.


No need to say that this is a delightful book.


“Silver Pitchers” is only one of nine stories embraced in this volume; it tells how three pretty young girls formed themselves into a society to do what they could in a modest way to stem social intemperance, and make the young men with whom they associated strong to withstand temptation. The badge of the society was a silver pitcher. The chief story is the last one in the book, written especially for this our Centennial year. It is called “Independence,” and is a thorough love-story. It portrays in a very vivacious way how “John” and “Dolly” are brought together in a number of bright, piquant scenes, which all have a dash of old times in them, and a smattering of history and a show-up of “relics;” then their course of true love is interrupted, and “Dolly” is about being given away by an obdurate aunt to a rich and ancient admirer; the young folks make a declaration of independence, and, one fine morning, elope, making a bridal tour to the Exhibition. The story will be numbered among the best and brightest things Miss Alcott has written. The other stories in the book make up a volume of special interest.


Silver Pitchers is the title of a volume of nine or ten short stories by Miss Alcott, all or most of which have before appeared in various publications. That from which the volume takes its title tells how some young ladies went to work to reform the drinking
habits of their young gentlemen acquain-
tances by a judicious mixture of frowns
and smiles, discipline and encouragement.
Perhaps their plan wouldn’t have worked
quite so well in real life, but it makes a
very fair story. Although this story is, of
course, not plagiarized, yet it is probable
that just before writing the author must
have read Mr Hale’s “New Crusade.” Miss
Alcott’s merit as a story writer is her vi-
vacious naturalness, truth to nature, and
the sound moral which she always en-
forces. She never strikes deep chords, and
her tales are quite destitute of any pro-
found insight into human nature. She at-
ttempts nothing of the sort, and doubtless
in that respect shows a better apprecia-
tion of the conditions of the literary mar-
ket than many writers. She writes for the
million, and what the million want is not
philosophy or psychology, but just pleas-
antly told moral tales, with no uncomfort-
able depths about them to flounder about
in. In writing this sort of stories Miss Al-
cott certainly carries off the palm from her
American competitors, and as for others,
why they don’t write that class of stories
in any other country. They are thoroughly
American.

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[Sanborn, Franklin B.¿].
*Springfield Daily Republican* (22 June
1876): 3:3.

The popularity of Miss Alcott as a writer
of juvenile stories continues unabated, and
her new book “Silver Pitchers,” published
by Roberts, is selling fast. It is a collec-
tion of short stories, most of which have
appeared before in the magazines or news-
papers; and which are very diverse in char-
acter and plot, while alike in that perpet-
ual fertility and liveliness of mind which
makes Miss Alcott so attractive as an au-
thor. It is not so much what she says that
makes the charm, – still less is it what is
ordinarily meant by “style,” since she has
no definite style. But the overflowing of
a strong, cheerful and moral nature, to
which all these tales owe their existence;
the keen observation of every-day life, the
wit, the freedom of touch, and the wholes-
some emotion of Miss Alcott, all combine
to maintain her popularity. She writes bet-
ter than formerly, because with more prac-
tice and self-knowledge; yet there is no es-
sential change in the tone and character
of her books. Whatever she has seen and
felt she can describe with feeling; where
imagination is needed, she does not suc-
cceed so well. But cold criticism is ill ap-
plied to works like this, which everywhere
bubbles with life. One story, “Transcen-
dental Wild Oats,” is little more than a
transcript of some of the experiences of the
Alcott household at “Fruitlands” in Har-
vard, thirty-odd years since, when Mr Al-
cott’s English friend, Charles Lane, joined
him in an impracticable plan of ideal farm-
ing and holy living in Massachusetts. The
story is well told, but per-perhaps [sic]
with too light a touch, – for it was a very
serious experience, – much more so than
that of Hawthorne at Brook Farm.

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*Zion’s Herald* 53.25

It is not necessary to name the stories, or
to intimate that they bear the unmistak-
able marks of their authorship. If they did
not, with her name on the title-page, the
book would be devoured, at least by “our
girls.”
There are a few authors who have acquired such favor with the public, that everything coming from their pen is eagerly welcomed. Miss Alcott is an honored member of the select fraternity. Her publishers have nothing to do but announce the appearance of Little Pitchers and sufficient orders come in to exhaust the first edition of the book and a thousand copies beside. But plenty of Silver Pitchers will be ready in a short time, so that all who wish may invest in the pleasing series of short stories which the author so well knows how to make interesting. These stories written in the sprightly and versatile style which has made Miss Alcott such a general favorite with the reading world, all point a moral as well as adorn a tale. The initial one, the Silver Pitchers, is a winsome plea in the cause of temperance; Transcendental Wild Oats is a ludicrous caricature of the impracticability of transcendentalism; Anna’s Whim presents a questionable experiment, which might not always lead to so happy a result, though it is a capital illustration of the importance to women of having a purpose in life. The most seasonable story in the collection is Independence, a Centennial Love Story, which is first presented to the public in this volume. The happy lovers end their trials by a runaway marriage and go to the Centennial to spend their honeymoon. The way the result is brought about is given in the writer’s most vivacious mood, abounds in a keen sense of the comic, and interweaves with the story many pretty reminiscences of revolutionary times. Silver Pitchers will commend itself to general favor, and will find hosts of interested readers to laugh over its fun, imbibe its sensible teaching, and thank its genial author for the pleasant way in which she urges the practice of those virtues which are essential elements of the noblest character.

‘Silver Pitchers’ is a collection of stories by Miss Alcott, which will need no recommendation to find plenty of readers. It may be doubted, however, whether those over twenty will find keen delight in them, for every one of them is of the lightest weight. That entitled ‘Transcendental Wild Oats’ describing the vagaries of a socialist who founded a ‘community,’ is full of amusing and lifelike touches. His method of meeting adversity is agreeably ridiculous. When his whole socialistic scheme failed and he was penniless, he lay on his bed with his face turned to the wall and tried to starve himself to death in the presence of his family. Two days of this were enough to convince him of the unwisdom of the plan.

It is always refreshing to read Miss Alcott’s stories, if for nothing else, for the inexhaustible relish of youthfulness which pervades them. Whether she labels them as fathers and mothers, uncles or aunts, guardians, teachers, or lovers, her characters are all boys and girls, whose shoulders have never felt the burden of the time.
which presses so heavily on the rest of us, and whose minds are guiltless of that introspective self-contemplation which it is the delight of modern novelists to depict. They live, moreover, in a delightfully simple and easy world, untroubled by any of the complexities and difficulties which beset our own, and where the fabled achievements of the Arabian genii are dwarfed into commonplace by the every-day performances of its inhabitants. In our own world the vice of intemperance has perplexed the law-makers, shamed religion, and repeatedly defeated the best endeavors of the philanthropists; but in Miss Alcott’s world two or three village-belies have only to make up their minds that it mars the beauty of their rustic paradise, and, presto! it disappears before the magic of their influence. The virtues, indeed, fairly clamor for recognition; vice slinks instantly away before the glance of a disapproving eye; good resolutions not only always triumph, but make the difficulties which they encounter ridiculous by their insignificance; and the entire population has only to be “jolly” in order to have the time fleet as merrily as it did in the golden age. One would suppose that these youthful, not to say juvenile, qualities would naturally be abated by the progress of time and the lessons of experience, but Miss Alcott’s latest volume is as fresh, lively, entertaining, and optimistic, as the first she wrote. It contains nine short stories, bristling with morals and reeking with fun, and addressed apparently to that numerous and interesting class of young ladies who are experiencing the delicious transition from short skirts to “trains.” One of the best of them is called “A Centennial Love-Story,” and it will place a new obstacle in the way of satisfactorily seeing the great show at Philadelphia by compelling its readers to conjecture that they see “Dolly” in every especially prettywaiter-girl, and “John” in every young man with a sketch-book under his arm.


A sheaf of nine stories, in Miss Alcott’s piquant and spicy style, with now a touch of pathos which brings tears into the eyes, and now a sparkle of humor which brings the laughter. In “Transcendental Wild Oats,” we have a real contribution to the history of the experiments, like Brook Farm, with which Mr. Frothingham’s *History of Transcendentalism* has just made us freshly acquainted; and side by side with that, and with the revelations of Hawthorne’s journals on this subject, should be read this chapter in which Miss Alcott sketches the humorous and tragic aspects of the history with a rare sympathy. “By the River” is tenderly sympathetic with the unappreciated struggles of a rural genius for light and air. In the story from which the volume takes its name a picture is drawn of the success of three young girls in introducing a temperance reform in their town, – a pleasing but rather rose-colored picture, in which obstacles melt away like morning mist, much more harmlessly than they usually do in real life. But this is the story-teller’s privilege.

**The Athenaeum** 2546 (12 August 1876): 206.

‘Silver Pitchers,’ the first story in Miss Alcott’s volume is a pretty temperance tale,
much pleasanter than temperance moralities have the gift of being in general. It tells how three beautiful young girls made a league together to induce the young men of their acquaintance to forswear the use of wine or stimulants. The young ladies in Miss Alcott’s tale are American, and the conditions of American society are somewhat different from our own, so that English girls, whilst adopting the spirit, must carry out the details according to their own sense of ingenuity and propriety. It is, however, a certain fact that if women choose they can do more for the cause of temperance than all the “Permissive Bills” and speeches in Parliament or elsewhere put together. The other stories in this volume are not temperance tales, but pretty, graceful sketches, such as Miss Alcott well knows how to write. ‘Letty’s Tramp’ is the best, but we wish there had been some further intelligence about the “Little Men and Women,” and above all some tidings about that darling of our heart, the Old-fashioned Girl, who, we heartily hope, is still alive and well.


In *Silver Pitchers*, by Miss Alcott, [Theophilus and Others, and For Summer Afternoons] we have three volumes of short stories and papers by popular and well-known writers. *Silver Pitchers*, which gives the name to the first volume, is a capital temperance tale, quite different from the ordinary pattern of melodramatic misery.

Miss Alcott is seldom at her best in short stories, and of the nine contained in the present volume, there is only one that will compare either in interest or in deftness of literary workmanship with “Little Women,” and its charming congeners. The one to which we refer is the “Centennial Love Story,” which has not, like the others, been previously published, and which is supposed to have a special appropriateness to the anniversary we are all celebrating, though it must be confessed that the relation established by marrying the lovers and sending them to the Exposition to seek their fortunes is rather remote. Aside from its relevancy, however, the story is excellent, possessing, among other things, the rare merit of treating the delicate subjects of love and marriage in precisely the spirit with which it is desirable that our youths and maidens should be familiarized – neither morbid nor mawkish, neither preachy nor frivolous. “Silver Pitchers” is a temperance tale, and the book carries about as many morals as it contains stories; but if Miss Alcott’s ultimate aim is “improvement,” she disguises it wonderfully well, and her instruction is livelier than other people’s fun. Vivacity, indeed, is Miss Alcott’s most conspicuous and most persistent characteristic, and in these her latest stories it shows no sign of depression or abatement. Her writing seldom exhibits wit, and is rarely humorous, but it is inspired by an overflowing spirit of fun, which seldom subsides to a point where it can be characterized as mere cheerfulness. A child’s outlook upon life is not more wholesomely optimistic than Miss Alcott’s, and her books
communicate happiness to children by sheer contagion.


Miss Alcott’s stories are of very unequal merit. The first, ‘Silver Pitchers,’ which is a teetotal story, is possible. The next, ‘Anna’s Whim,’ a love story, is capital. The third, ‘Transcendental Wild Oats,’ is simple extravagance and nonsense. ‘My Rococo Watch’ is a quiz on travelling follies. All, however, are native to their American soil, and point to characteristics and blots of American social life, into the full significance of which we can scarcely enter. Of course, Miss Alcott is ingenious in devising her incidents and graceful in telling them.

**The Catholic World** 24.139 (October 1876): 144.

Of course our Centennial would not be complete without its Centennial literature. We have had odes, poems, and all manner of bursts of song which might have been better, judged from a literary point of view, but which all possess the one undeniable character of genuine and unbounded enthusiasm. It was but proper, therefore, that we should have some Centennial story telling, and we are glad that the task has fallen into no worse hands then [than] those of Miss Alcott. This lady has already recommended herself to the reading public by a series of fresh, sprightly, and very readable little volumes. She tells a story well. She is not pretentious, yet never low, and the English has not suffered at her hands. Of late it has somehow become the vogue among so-called popular writers to supply true tact and the power to enlist interest by a sort of *double-entendre* style which, if it does not run into downright indecency, is at least prurient; and, alas! that we should have to say that our lady writers especially lay themselves open to this charge.

To our own credit be it said that this reprehensible manner of writing is more common in England than among ourselves. Miss Alcott has avoided these faults; and in saying this we consider we have said much in her praise. Her *Silver Pitchers* is a charming little temperance story told in her best vein. It is somewhat New-Englandish, but that has its charms for some – ourselves, we must confess, among the number. Pity Miss Alcott could not understand that there are higher and nobler motives for temperance than the mere impulse it gives to worldly success and the desire to possess a good name. The siren cup will never be effectually dashed aside by the tempted ones till prayer and supernatural considerations come to their assistance.

**Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices**

ROSE IN BLOOM; A SEQUEL TO “EIGHT COUSINS” (1876)
Everybody, we suppose, read “Eight Cousins,” and now, as a matter of course, everybody will read “Rose in Bloom,” which Miss Alcott has written as a sequel, and Roberts Brothers have just published. The author makes haste to assure her readers in advance that her story is not encumbered with a moral, although we presume that one could be found if one looked sharp enough. It would be the sheerest waste of time to say anything about the book for the purpose of calling public attention to it. New England people, old and young, have got into the habit of reading whatever Miss Alcott writes, and they will hardly pass by “Rose in Bloom.” It makes a handsome volume of nearly 400 pages, uniform with the former works of the author.

Miss Alcott improves in style, if not in originality and strength. Her last book, “Rose in Bloom,” is one of her best, though the worm of sickly sentiment is gnawing at its heart. Why she will vitiate her stories by dressing up her boys and girls in the guise of grown folks and torturing their little hearts with the agonies of love, is a mystery to us. An excess of this sentimental nonsense is the bane of all her stories. This story is too much spun out, though it has some bright dialogue. Charley is a contemptible young puppy, whom every masculine reader will long to kick. He might have been the original of Carlyle’s dandy. The little blue-blooded Campbells, most of whom turn up their noses at Phoebe when Archie wants to marry her, are mostly married off with due magnificence.

The sequel to the “Eight Cousins,” which the author calls “Rose in Bloom,” has the merits of most of Miss Alcott’s books, a friendly spirit of mutual helpfulness and a strong, beautiful family affection which makes the brothers, sisters and cousins laugh at, enjoy and stand by each other. The story is rather dull to the reader, although it is easy to see how interesting the young folks must have been to each other, and the two marriages to which the story leads are quite in defiance, one of the social, the other of the physiological, prepossessions of modern society, being founded on tried affection and noble character without regard to birth or relationship.

There is scarcely any author more certain, in advance of the publication of a new volume, of a cordial and enthusiastic welcome, than Miss Louisa M. Alcott, whose charming “Little Women,” is among the sweetest and freshest books of the past score of years. Everybody will be pleased with the announcement, by Roberts Brothers, Boston, of a new book by her, entitled...
Rose in Bloom, a sequel to “Eight Cousins,” and all who read the story in the latter volume, of the fair flower budding into womanhood, will turn with new affection to the fragrance of the Rose in Bloom. There is a strong, healthy family affection in all of Miss Alcott’s stories, and in this volume the vivacity with which most of her characters are possessed, the oddities and independence of conventional rules, are well illustrated, and the book will afford a pleasant conclusion to the former narrative, and prove popular with the thousand admirers of this ever cheery writer.


The booksellers are putting forth all their attractions as the Christmas holidays draw nigh, and of these, new books for boys and girls make no small share. Yet, by a well-known law of the mind, as boys and girls love what is above rather than what is on a level with them, they find an unusual charm in books like Miss Alcott’s “Rose in Bloom,” which verges on the full-grown novel. It is, in fact, more truly a novel than either “Moods” or the later story, “Work,” in which Miss Alcott has portrayed the characters of grown men and women. Without the ambitious design of a novel “made on purpose,” the “Rose in Bloom” is a natural story, with love for its main theme, and its situations, without being tragic, are often pathetic and sufficiently sentimental. There is no passion in the book, but there is less moralizing, conscious or unconscious, than Miss Alcott usually indulges in, and there is a great deal of natural and agreeable sentiment. The personages are the same as in “Eight Cousins,” only at a more advanced age, – and there is this advantage which the constant reference to the earlier story gives – namely, that we overlook anything too naive and familiar, in consideration of the time when the characters were all children together. It is a family, too, which will bear two or three books more, if the author chooses to write them, as all her readers hope she may. The present fiction shows a wider experience and a higher power than most of her former books, while, like them, it is pervaded with true feeling, warm and lively fancy, and those other qualities which have now become so well known in this popular author. “Rose in Bloom” will extend her popularity, and may serve as an introduction to a series of novels of this unpretending, but very agreeable kind.


Rose in Bloom, Miss Alcott’s last book, is in every way as meritorious as its predecessors. It is a sequel to “Eight Cousins,” and carries on the fortunes of the eight until all are satisfactorily settled in life. It hasn’t a single uninteresting page, and is as charming as her books always are. None must fail to read it.


Rose in Bloom is Miss Alcott’s contribution in the holiday season, and none will
be more welcome to the young folks. It is a sequel of her story about “Eight Cousins” last year, the same girls and boys at a somewhat more advanced age being the characters. The book is in fact devoted to their love affairs, Rose being the center of general and clashing admiration. Nobody hits off the life-like likeness of the typical New England girl of this passing epoch more truthfully and accurately than Miss Alcott. In her stories the girls are described as exercising a profound moral influence for encouragement, reward and reproof upon the young men about them. Foreign critics have wondered if a society could be correctly depicted in which very young girls are described as assuming a function so delicate and high. But Miss Alcott does not exaggerate the extent to which the best of New England girls act as conservators of the morals of their young men friends. So far as it is practised, it is the most graceful and effective moral censorship in our society, and the extent of its influence is only limited by the number of our young women who can rise to such a conception of the responsibility of their sex. Otherwise than as a picture of specimen New England young womanhood, Miss Alcott disclaims any moral for her story, but that is moral enough.

Miss Alcott’s ‘Rose in Bloom’ (Roberts Bros.), being a sequel to her ‘Eight Cousins,’ requires a previous acquaintance with the latter work. Rose, who returns from Europe, is engaged as the story ends; but as the line between what is juvenile reading and what is not must be drawn somewhere, we suppose childish curiosity in regard to her married life will not be gratified. Her lover seeks to give a direction to her blooming and unfolding, and hands her Emerson’s ‘Essays,’ with marked passages and leaves turned down: tells her that Emerson “has done more to set young men and women thinking than any man in this century at least”; quotes “my Thoreau” at her, by way of poetical reproof”; and easily beguiles her into correspondence on the subject of her reading. Mac’s declaration and subsequent courtship take us to the utmost verge of fiction for minors.


Miss Alcott’s name on the cover of a book is a talisman for the little men and women she loves so well, and whatever is found upon the pages turns to gold in their eyes. We need not therefore say a single word to commend “Rose in Bloom” to their tender care, for she has already become “the rose that all are praising,” and the beautiful flowers by thousands are shedding their fragrance on as many homes all over the land. Miss Alcott possesses a great gift, and “Rose in Bloom” shows that her facile pen has not lost its power to charm. Rose Campbell, the heroine of the new tale, is already a well known favorite in the “Eight Cousins.” She is introduced fresh from a European tour, and wins all hearts by the graces of mind and person she possesses. She has a score of lovers, and after many troubles gives her heart to “Cousin Mac,” who has patiently waited and hoped for the prize. The denouement is reached through an
experience diversified in the writer’s happiest vein. There are incidents that make us laugh, and those that make us weep. There is an undue proportion of love-making, and we are out of patience with Charlie for his weakness and conceit, but the course of true love never did run smooth, and life would be humdrum if it did. “Rose in Bloom” takes on proportions more like a regular romance than anything else Miss Alcott has written. It is one of the books that will win its way to universal favor without any formal presentation of its merits, and we wish many other gifted authors were as sure of finding ten thousand readers as the one who so happily touches the sympathies of the youthful heart.


The lively and popular authoress affirms that her story has no moral, but it has many sweet and impressive lessons of temper and conduct. Of course every family of young children must have a copy of everything written by the author of Little Women.

_Hartford Daily Courant_ 40.306 (23 December 1876): 2:3.

Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s _Rose in Bloom_ is a fresh, healthy story, delightful in itself, and the more welcome in contrast with the trashy sentimental stuff, and the flashy and sensational, so often put out in girls’ books. As a sequel to her “Eight Cousins,” this carries forward to happy conclusion the experience of characters already familiar, and it is a book which all readers will enjoy. Of a host of works directed to the same class of readers which have been published for the holidays, _Rose in Bloom_ stands among the very first in all that is commendable. Truly there are certain objections we might make to some of the events of the book; in some things the fates might have ruled differently and with equal wisdom, yet this is a mere matter of taste and in no way contradicts the sentiment of general approval already expressed for the story.


These four from Roberts Brothers will be among the books most sought for holiday gifts, and most heartily welcomed by the children . . . Miss Alcott’s book is a worthy sequel to the _Eight Cousins_. Like several of her stories it treats mainly of older children and their affairs, but will be eagerly and harmlessly devoured by those of all ages.


Another story which we can also recommend to young ladies is Miss Alcott’s “Rose in Bloom.” Miss Alcott always excels in
describing small social events, and the description of the ball is very happy.

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**The Christian Register**


This is a sequel to “Eight Cousins.” Though each is a story complete in itself, yet those who have read the last year’s book will be glad to follow the cousins into their maturer life; and those who begin with the sequel will wish to go back into their earlier history. As the title indicates, Rose, after two years’ journeyings in foreign lands, returns, no longer the mere schoolgirl, but a woman, with all the aspirations of a true womanhood, to take possession of the wealth she inherits, with its temptations and responsibilities. Meanwhile the boy cousins have developed into manhood. Rose is to them still the centre of influence for joy or for sorrow, but always for blessing. Without being silly or prudish, she is not so destitute of weakness as to be an unnatural model or an unsympathetic friend.

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This is a sequel to “The Eight Cousins.” We like this book. It is written sensibly, simply and with a pretty vivacity, which excites the fancy and engages sympathy, and its chief excellence lies in the strong natural picture of young life which is contained within its covers.

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**Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices**


**The Commonwealth** 15th year.12 (18 November 1876): [3]:3.

**New-York Tribune** 36.11,144 (16 December 1876): 8:2.

**The Nation** 23.599 (21 December 1876): 373.
A MODERN MEPHISTOPHELES (1877; REPRINTED WITH A WHISPER IN THE DARK, 1889)
The latest of the “No Name Series” of Messrs. Roberts Brothers, is a marvelous metaphysical story, a wonderful paraphrase entitled, *A Modern Mephistopheles*. Ths [The] story is, briefly, of one who sold his honor for fame’s sake, the tempter being a creation of extraordinary power in fiction. One almost shudders while reading this tale, it is so fraught with intensity of evil design on the part of the leading character. The designs are not, however, for evils [evil’s] own sake, the wicked one seeming to probe, to tempt, to excite, to play, to thwart, to encourage, to disappoint: in short, to develop all emotions in those he puts his power upon, simply to witness the workings of human hearts, minds and bodies. A poor, but bright and fascinating young man, has written a book of poems; his book is refused by a publisher; he prepares to commit suicide; he is saved from self-death, and his saviour “brings out” the book of poems. A grand literary triumph ensues. The poet lives with and becomes a slave in a measure to his benefactor. A beautiful girl is brought into this circle; the poet is forced to wed her, by the promptings and ingenious temptings of his master – for master, by some means, the benefactor has become. After a thousand temptations and a thousand fleeting joys, the secret of his master’s hold is shown, the successful works have been from the master’s pen; the young man has gained a reputation by fraud. Expiation ensues. Only the story itself can describe the wondrous workings of the tempter. His power, his deliberate exercise of the greatest gifts, his fearful, cool, designing wickedness are almost matchless in anything of novel-kind we know of. The writer develops his characters after Hawthorne’s manner, and is only inferior o [to] him in psychological depiction. This story is the greatest of all the prose efforts in this series, for intensity and power, albeit it is a pain in many ways to read it. One does not take pleasure in seeing a butterfly stripped of its wings, a bird torn in its plumage, even if these acts are committed in the sunshine. The style of the writer is that of no novice. Some hand of skill has been at work here, and for ourselves we feel at greater loss to divine the author, and a greater desire so to do than we have before felt since the “series” first began. *A Modern Mephistopheles* is sure to create a profound impression and to be in great demand. The paraphrase of the story of Goethe’s poem is remarkable in very many ways. Setting aside the tale as such, the diction is glowing, full of fine imagery and sometime startling transition and depiction. The chapter in which Gladys displays the power of hashish, is an extraordinary one for word painting – the painter seems even to be under the influence of the drug himself. We should not be surprised to find the name of Helwyse passing into proverbial use as describing a man with a demon’s heart. The story is to come from the press on the 25th of this month.


The sixth volume of the “No Name Series” is called “A Modern Mephistopheles,”
and has a very singular plot and style. It is probably by Mrs Prescott Spofford, but there are many parts of the book which sound like Miss Alcott, while some things in it recall Julian Hawthorne. It is violently improbable, and by no means satisfactory in its reading, but there is talent in it, and a certain degree of interest. The names of the characters betray Mrs Spofford, for no one else would baptize persons “Gladys,” or “Canaris.” Helwyse, I believe, is a name already found in novels, chosen for the bad pun it covers. It is to be presumed that New England is the scene of the story, though nothing could be more foreign to New England than such modes of life and phases of character as are here described. I will not give an outline of the plot, for there is an ingenuity in it which ought not to lose its full effect by being disclosed. Being a disagreeable story, I hardly think it will sell as well as the previous volumes, but nobody can tell. The series, as a whole, has been very successful, having an average sale of 5000 copies, which, in these times, is doing well, though it would have been despised half a dozen years ago, when each new book by Miss Alcott used to sell 50,000 copies.

The Commonwealth 15th year.36 (5 May 1877): [1]:7.

A Modern Mephistopheles, of the “No Name series,” may be regarded as the most extraordinary of the series – alike for the power embodied in the narrative, and for the revelation of a writer that may claim to stand with Goethe and Hawthorne in psychological delineation. There is intensity and subtlety sufficient in it to indicate that it is the work of a woman’s hand – keen, thoughtful, observant. To borrow a contemporary’s description of the plot: “The characters are Jasper Helwyse and Mrs. Olivia Surry, Felix Canaris, who is half Greek, and a girl named Gladys. The modern Mephistopheles is he who bears the name allusive to the infernal regions. Before Mrs. Surry married they had loved, but when an accident laid him up for a couple of years, and left him a sufferer for life, she sought another mate. She is now a widow and returned repentant to Helwyse, who amuses himself by tormenting her. Canaris he picks up and makes his secretary, using his name for his poetical effusions, which gain great applause. Gladys he falls in love with, after first trying the experiment of his fascinations on her and marrying her to Canaris. Gladys thinks Canaris a poet. In the end Gladys, who has been inveigled into becoming nurse and reader to the ailing Helwyse, discovers that her young husband is no poet at all, but that all the books have been dictated by Helwyse. This causes her to die in child-birth. Canaris renounces the service of his Mephistopheles, and on the wretched Olivia devolves the task of soothing the last moments of the cultured villain who has killed the only woman he can really love, namely, Gladys.” The matchless wickedness of the tempter is set off, in the various situations given him, in a manner that almost curdles one’s blood. It is a perpetual shudder in the perusal. To discover the workings of the human heart is the motive of all his devilish cunning, not simply the gratification of an evil propensity. Not only is there power in the creation of the characters, but in the descriptive narrative, in the very language, situations, diction – all that makes up the work. It is a marvel of modern novel-writing.
This is a romance of rare merit. One that steadily absorbs the attention from its beginning to its close, and one which culminates in a powerfully interesting scene that could only have been evolved from a vigorous imagination. It teaches anew the lesson that those who “play dark sorcery with the heart of man” must in the end drink the bitter cup of defeat, degradation and despair, to the uttermost dregs, and that men must ever become edged weapons, cutting both ways to those who employ their fellows only to accomplish evil or selfish purposes. There are only four characters of importance in the book, but they are individualized with great skill, and admirably contrasted. They may be said to remotely typify the Mephistopheles, the Margaret, the Faust and the Martha of Goethe’s poem. The author has marked talent for the dissection of the motives that influence human actions, and the book abounds in subtle analyses which show a close study of those obscure mental promptings which so often baffle detection. Helwyze is a remarkable study of what a man might become by cultivating his intellect at the expense of his heart until he arrogates to himself the wisdom and the power of Omnipotence, and Gladys is a delightful illustration of pure womanhood. Canaris is well portrayed in his physical beauty, his voluptuous nature and insincerity – his inheritance with his Greek blood, and Olivia, in her mature Oriental beauty and sensuousness, is also cleverly depicted. The style of the book reminds one sometimes of Julian Hawthorne and sometimes of Harriet Prescott Spofford, and though it occasionally seems a little too highly wrought it betrays everywhere an accomplished and experienced hand. In point of literary merit it must take a very high, if not the first, rank in the No Name Series.

Helwyse, with the heart and brain of a fiend, Canaris, willing to sell his soul for worldly fame, and Gladys, the angelic element, form the principal characters in this wild and exciting romance, fashioned after the model of Goethe’s Faust. It arouses the reader’s deepest interest throughout the unfolding of the wild plot, fills his heart with painful emotions at the tragic close; for the penalty of unholy deeds makes the innocent head lie low in the grave, consigns to a life worse than death the fiendish tempter who spread his wily snares to entrap human souls, and drives forth the repentant young aspirant for fame friendless and penniless, to commence anew the combat of life. The story is one of remarkable power, its pen-pictures are outlined by a master’s hand, its diction is glowing with warm life, and its imagery is bold and effective. The scene where Gladys illustrates the power of hashish is startling in its effective presentation, the author’s marvelous gift at word-painting seeming to bring the creation before the mind’s eye with all the power of brush and oil. “A Modern Mephistopheles” will make its mark, for all who read it will be greatly impressed with the ingenuity of the paraphrase, and the ability with which the writer wields the pen. Every one will be eager to find out the name of the author. We are as much in the dark as any one, though we cherish a
suspicion that this romance is fashioned by the same hand whose former flight of fancy found expression in “Amber Gods.”


The latest No Name book, by the same house, is not very well received. It is a strange, mythical, and unsatisfactory story. There is power in it, however, and more of the quality of – it may be not genius, but something akin to it – than in any of the stories that have preceded it. The impression prevails here that Julian Hawthorne wrote it. It is not as good as his “Bressant,” but is not unlike his “Idolatry,” and has those qualities that make the reader impatient both with this book and with the unfinished “Garth.” Still there are points in such a writer that show the fire of something more than talent, even if his light does at times burn balefully.


“A Modern Mephistopheles” is the last number of the “No Name” Series, which title it bears for form’s sake, or by the common courtesy of publisher and reader. If Mrs. Harriet Prescott Spofford wished to try a harmless experiment, she has failed; for no one familiar with her former stories can read ten pages of “A Modern Mephistopheles” without recognizing her hand. She has, perhaps, subdued a few of Miss Evan’s southern characters play that they are misanthropic gentlemen; and Olivia is a kind of Cleopatra in sumptuousness, with a kind of incoherent habit of living about in New England palaces that we do not at all understand. Canori [Canaris] started out to be a Marble Faun, and thought better of it, thanks to Gladys, who is also an inhabitant of fairy land, but a most sweet and charming creature. For the sake of Gladys the book has a reason for being. The story is pure romance and impossibility, but Gladys is a lovely vision, whose influence upon all readers will not be inconsiderable, in winning many, let us hope, to love truth and virtue.

But with all its unearthliness, the romance is one of decided psychological power. It could only have been written by a master of the language of lush description, and by one who has much subtlety of thought and a tropical imagination. From internal evidence we have no hesitation in attributing it to the genius of Mrs. Harriet Prescott Spofford. It is certainly remarkable in having nothing of the commonplace in it.

her cherished habits; she is less lavish with gold and gems and colors; but she cannot escape the pervading atmosphere of luxury wherein her Muse breathes most freely. The names of Helwyze (Hellwise!), Canaris, and Gladys testify of her: the four moral and intellectual forces, clothed with externally appropriate garments of flesh, which constitute the only personages of the story, act and speak in obedience to her literary will and law; and we cannot escape the necessity of estimating the work from the point of view of her evident design. It is decidedly the best novel of the series, thus far, and it is one of Mrs. Spofford’s best performances. She goes to the opposite extreme of the realism which is now so popular (and apparently growing more so) in fiction: her characters are independent of time or place – almost of race – and their fate is determined, not by any circumstance of earthly life, but by the operation of abstract mental or spiritual laws. The luxury which invariably surrounds them forms a singular yet by no means unpleasant setting for the few main actions which the author allows them. When they have worked out the problem prescribed at the beginning of the story, she lets them go. The leading idea of “A Modern Mephistopheles” is ingenious: the characters are skillfully chosen to represent it: the one secret in the story is beyond the guessing of most readers, and admirably concealed until the true moment for its disclosure; and the dénouement is as satisfactory as we could expect. Helwyze, like Goethe’s Mephistopheles, wills the Bad and works the Good: the justice of Fate falls upon him and not upon his victim. But this is the only point of resemblance. Gladys, although occupying the place of Margaret, is an entirely different creature, and it is the best success of the author’s art that she is more real to us than the other three characters. The work belongs to the class of imaginative fiction, which claims its right to dispense with probability or even strict dramatic consistency. It cannot be measured by the standard which we apply to novels of society or of ordinary human interests, but rather by that which belongs to poetry. The author has gained both in force and harmony, by learning to suppress her natural predilection for strong, glowing color and somewhat violent situations. She is beginning to feel the truth of the old Greek artistic maxim, “Nothing in excess!” and her powers of imagination and expression are all the more distinct and attractive when relieved of some of the glittering trappings they have been accustomed to wear.


A marvellous metaphysical story – the greatest of all in the ‘No Name Series.’


It is unquestionably the work of a genius, whose hand painted these marvellous pictures of the angel and the demon striving for mastery in every human soul.

It certainly has exceptional originality and powerful handling.


The heroine, Gladys, deserves to rank among the best things of its kind in later fiction.


Roberts Brothers have issued the fourth of their No Name Series, under the borrowed, but expressive title of A Modern Mephistopheles. It is a wild story, with the terrible fascination, if lacking the singular grace, of Hawthorne’s tales. It is a sensational story of marked power, improbable, full of fearful passion and intensity, and demanding a large contribution from the bruised sensibilities of its readers, without any considerable compensation in the skill and power shown in the conception and execution of the work, or in the moral lessons which it develops.


The latest issue of the “No Name” Series claims precedence not only because it is the freshest novelty, but through an excellence that places it readily first. Considered alike for its interest as a tale and for its elegance of literary art, it is a work that alone will give distinction to the series. The plot is peculiarly novel in its details, if not in its general conception; and throughout the story the most pervading impression is that of the freshness – not crudeness, but the freshness of mature thought – which it everywhere carries. The title is but a hint. It is no revamping of Goethe’s story of Faust, nor a plagiarism of ideas in any form; unless the central thought, of the “woman-soul that leads us upward and on,” which is common to romantic as to psychological fiction, may be considered such. The characters are drawn with a sharp outline, standing forth as distinctly individual as the etchings of Retsch; and for symmetry and consistency, in every word and every action which the author makes them think, speak or do, they are thoroughly admirable creations. Four figures only appear in the action on this little stage, and the story, when analyzed, shows a strange absence of what is usually considered the dramatic element. Yet such is the skill of the author that the reader is led on as by the most vivid
material tragedy, compelled by the development of thought and feeling. More than this, the book is a constant intellectual delight. The grace of the author’s style is equalled by its finish. Description and conversation are like a fine mosaic, in which the delicate art of the workmanship passes unseen, and the eye catches only the perfect picture until a close examination reveals the method of its structure. It is throughout a most enjoyable tale, complete as a romance, although ending uncompleted, but with suggestions that would fill a volume. Who wrote it? If not a master, then one who has the certainty of mastership within him.


The black and cardinal red covers of A Modern Mephistopheles, the last volume in Roberts Brothers’ “No Name Series,” well befit its dismal and lurid, but taking title. To guess the authorship is an easier task than it has been in the case of the previous volumes, for if any American writer save Mrs. Prescott Spofford could have produced the story we have not met with any of that writer’s works. Mrs. Spofford has a field of her own – a field of romance, and weirdness, and mystery, and glamour, and rich color, and musky perfume. The present story reads almost like a burlesque of the author’s previous tales. There is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous, and it would need but a slight change in this romance to make it a favorite with the young ladies and gentlemen who read and write for The Waverley Magazine. We could copy dozens of most stilted and inflated passages; but it is hardly worth while. Mrs. Spofford deliberately adopts the romantic manner, which is a legitimate and enjoyable one; and in it she is a master. Her intensity is sometimes strained to the verge of the melodramatic and the painful, not to say the absurd. The present novel is hardly up to the level of “The Amber Gods” and “Sir Rohan’s Ghost.” It ranks with “Azarian,” which story it much resembles, although it is its superior in interest. We greatly like her abandonment of the ordinary mechanism of contemporary novelists. The story might have been written in the seventeenth century, or the twentieth. It is, in fact, a wild prose poem, which might as well have been written in burning verse. It is in literature something akin to Turner’s “Slave Ship” in art.


This singular story, which is attracting so much attention, is thrilling, weird, and intense to an unusual degree, without the unhealthy moral atmosphere which characterizes so many novels. The loving and hopeful spirit which breathes through the book, steals the gloom from the tragic incidents, leaving us saddened, but not chilled, at the close.

The characters are well drawn, and only one of them is contemptible; but the chief charm of the book centers about “Little Gladys,” to whom all the others become of secondary interest, and whose loveliness turns the story into a poem.

The style is faulty, and the plot improbable, though interesting and ingenious.
The book has, however, merits enough to atone for greater imperfections. We quote from a love scene to show the writer’s sentiments upon the “Woman question.”

Gladys, upon learning that Helwyze is the author of a gift lately received, and hearing him called her “master,” says –

“He is not my master. I shall not go, if I am to be burdened with benefits. I will earn my just due, but not be over paid. Tell him so.”

Gladys unclasped the cross, and threw the pearls upon the grass, where they lay gleaming like great drops of frozen dew. Canaris, drawing nearer, asked, in a tone which gave the question its true meaning: –

“May I be your master, Gladys?”
“Not even you.”
“Your slave, then?”
“Never that.”
“Your lover?”
“Yes.”

As to the vexed question of the authorship, we feel satisfied that the book is the work of Miss Alcott.

The New York Tribune, in noticing “A Modern Mephistopheles,” says, “[I sentence omitted.] If Mrs. Harriet Prescott Spofford wished to try a harmless experiment, she has failed; for no one familiar with her former stories can read ten pages of ‘A Modern Mephistopheles’ without recognizing her hand.” Then follows a very able criticism of the book and its supposed author. “It is decidedly the best novel of the series, thus far, and it is one of Mrs. Spofford’s best performances”; and closes by saying “the author has gained both in force and harmony by learning to suppress her natural predilection for strong glowing color and somewhat violent situations. [1 sentence omitted.]” This is decidedly the funniest of all the funny things which have happened in connection with the “No Name” novels, for we happen to know that Harriet Prescott Spofford is not the author of “A Modern Mephistopheles.” The real author and the publishers cannot therefore be likened to the deluded hen, who with her head in the bushes flatters herself she is completely concealed.
A Modern Mephistopheles is the sixth of the “No Name” sisterhood, and it bears as little likeness to its predecessors as they to each other. The “Modern Mephistopheles” is a clever saturnine invalid, with a morbid taste for experimenting on human souls. His subjects are a youthful pair, lovers when the story opens, husband and wife afterward; whom his manipulations first unite, and later separate – by the saddest and most final of separations. There are absolutely no other dramatis personae, except an older woman madly in love with the invalid. The interest centers around these four figures. With all its unlikeness, one traces through the whole narrative a fine thread of association with the story of the ancient Faust. There are the tempter, the temptation, the tempted one; the sin, the flawless purity, the expiation in suffering; but the likeness is so delicately worked out that the dark lesson of the old tale exists here but as a softening shadow. Gladys, the Margaret of this new rendering, is as pure a little vision, and as distinct in her pureness, as a lily set in a June garden. There is something of an exquisite art in the way in which she is made real to us in her gracious, womanly stillness, – a mixture of child, wife and flower. For the authorship – we suppose everybody is allowed a guess – ours hovers between Miss Alcott and Mrs. Spofford. Certain turns of phrase and movement suggest the former, though the style throughout exhibits a painstaking nicety and finish which that clever writer does not always allow herself time to achieve, while the luxuriant fancy which would indicate Mrs. Spofford is curbed and reined in with a discretion not always manifested in her writings. The book is not without a very decided artistic power, though we cannot call it the most agreeable reading, nor do we think it altogether wholesome. – Since the above was in type we have seen what appears to be an authoritative declaration that Mrs. Spofford is not the author.

The Christian Register

Mrs. Harriet Prescott Spofford has been guessed to be the writer of this book, and with, it seems to us, excellent and quite sufficient reason. Her power is here, and something of her weakness; but of the former a good deal, and of the latter very little. The story is by far the ablest that has yet appeared in the series of which it is said to be the concluding volume. It is a romance rather than a novel. It is written out of time and space. So far removed from realism is the style, that when Olivia is called Mrs. Surry it gives us an unpleasant shock. She ought to be Olivia throughout, – “Olivia at the South,” and nothing more. There are a few other suggestions of an every-day world that also jar a little, and ought never to have marred the weird and pleasant unreality which is the general characteristic of the book. The story is a painful one, – the story of a man, whose nature had been poisoned by an early disappointment, indulging in a monstrous sort of vivisection, his material being not the bodies of brute creatures, but the souls of his companions. Gladys is the principal justification of the book. She is an exquisite creation, – pure and sweet,
and triumphing by virtue of her simple
goodness over all the art of Helwyze, the
modern Mephistopheles. We cannot be too
grateful to an author who creates for us
a vision of such tender truth and beauty.
The secret of the book is the sin of Can-
aris, the husband of Gladys. It comes out
at the end, gross, almost palpable, and in-
volving, if we do not much mistake, a se-
rious misapprehension. Passion for fame
could not be satisfied by such a miser-
able device as wearing borrowed finery.
To be fame, it must be won by one’s own
work. It is a pity this was not better man-
aged. We doubt if even Gladys could re-
deem so mean a scamp as Canaris is forced
to appear. Or could there be no limit to
the power of her wonderful “beauty of holiness”?

[Lathrop, G. P.]. The
Atlantic Monthly 40.237
(July 1877): 109.

We have not much doubt that Julian
Hawthorne is the author of A Modern
Mephistopheles; and the belief should be
understood as implying a compliment to
his powers, for the book is certainly a re-
markable one and instinct with ability. The
parallel with Goethe’s Faust which its ti-
tle at once challenges is not very close or
continuous, but it is as much so as it need
be. Indeed the author, whoever he or she,
male or female, may be, has managed this
variation on the master’s theme with much
good sense. We do not think Helwyze, who
takes the Mephistophilian part, is sup-
plied with a sufficient motive. He is, to
be sure, created in a vacuum from which
all real human nature has been previously
withdrawn, and cannot, therefore, be
expected to have very rational motives.
With this we have no quarrel; but even
after making such allowance, we fancy
that he begins operations too much as if
he were moved by a crank. Still, when
once he has started on his career of inhu-
man mischief, he works with entire con-
sistency, and his relations with the other
characters, Olivia, Canaris, and Gladys,
are harmonious and probable. Probable,
that is, when we take into account the figu-
Rative and hyperbolical atmosphere which
the author has chosen. It is a question
whether the outré effect gained by such a
choice is worth while, measured by any
profound truth enforced in the present
case. The whole drama seems like a move-
ment of shadows thrown from a portef-
Lumière upon a curtain of rather lurid mist;
and we cannot see how the heart is to be
touched by it. But granting that the lesson
will be ardently received by most readers,
it amounts only to this, that wanton exer-
cise of the intellect and a suppression of the
better forces in the heart are very danger-
ous and devilish. It is not always the case
that this kind of work involves high qual-
ities of imagination; not infrequently “cold
performs the effect of fire,” and invention
aided by talent may put on the likeness
of genuine creative ability. But define and
qualify as we may, it remains none the less
true that there is signal force of some sort
in this peculiar production. The turns in
the plot, the changes, the surprises, the
mystery for some time not even remotely
decipherable, all this is well done. The
character of Gladys is shaped with dignity
and some sweetness; and the chapter in
which Canaris undergoes the temptation
to murder fastens one’s attention with the
gradual and conclusive pressure of a vise.
The language is vigorous and clear, having
a sculpturesque effect, and the succession
of periods and paragraphs is often so ad-
mirable that many pages together seem to
be set to solemn rhythm.
We should judge, after reading a hundred pages of this book, that it was written by a young person, probably a girl, with much literary facility and fluency, and an excellent grasp of plot, but with little experience of life. The characters remind us of no one, and would be, indeed, in real life impossible; but they move in an atmosphere of their own, in which their actions and words seem consistent enough, till we turn from the world of fancy to that of reality. The language is stilted and dramatic sometimes, but never degenerates into slang or vulgarity. With advancing years and a larger experience the author may make her mark.

Felix Conaris, a disappointed and morbid poet of nineteen or twenty, has concluded to smother himself with carbonic acid gas from a brasier in his room—a poet’s garret. He has just fairly completed his arrangements, which are very simple and Parisian, and laid himself down, handsome as a god, to die, when Jasper Helwyze, something of a cynic, knocks at the door and interrupts the progress of the affair; enters and offers the disappointed poet a home, and the poet the position of a private secretary. This Canaris accepts in preference to annihilation, and, accompanying Helwyze to his house, is duly installed in office on the very same evening during which he had anticipated being found dead by his landlady and handed over to the coroner. Mr. Helwyze next proposes to publish the volume of poems that Canaris has projected; but the latter, while preparing them for the compositor, finds that they will make a very thin and meagre volume indeed, and so hesitates. He concludes finally to offer to make up the deficiency in poems of his own, provided Mr. Canaris will take the responsibility of them. The author appears to consider Canaris as under obligation to his patron on this account; but there are those who will regard the obligation as a very doubtful one. At least, the question of obligation one way or the other depends upon the quality of poems in such a case, and none of them are quoted. The real plot of the story thus opens with a poet who has satiated his ambition for fame by accepting the authorship of poems that he did not write, and has pledged his word in solemn compact never to set himself right by revealing the fact until he can obtain the permission of his patron. Two women now enter upon the scene—Olivia, who is earthly passion and intrigue, and little Gladys, who has narrowly escaped being an angel. Olivia loves Helwyze, and Helwyze loves Gladys; Canaris loves Olivia, and Gladys loves him. The poet proposes to Olivia, and is rejected. For the mere deviltry of the thing, being Mephistophelean in his instincts, and having some relations of Olivia that are very mistily expressed in the story, Helwyze persuades Canaris to marry Gladys, without telling her the truth of the authorship of the poems for which innocent little Gladys has such an extravagant admiration. This weighs heavily on his conscience as a species of obtaining goods under false pretences, but still his patron will not permit the revelation, although he intimates to Gladys that her husband has deceived her, never loved her, and is a disloyal adventurer. These are very
light trifles to found a plot upon; but, nevertheless, with an abnormal sensitiveness of conscience that can not let well enough alone, Canaris is restive under the pressure of his burden, and at last quarrels with his patron, who, in his rage, defies him to reveal and ruin himself. An éclaircissement now takes place, and proves very destructive to all the parties engaged. Gladys and her baby both die after effecting a reconciliation between Helwyze and Canaris, who has taken a vow to murder him. Helwyze is stricken with paralysis; Canaris drops off into the great world and is lost in its whirlpool, and Olivia lives, suffers, and meditates. There is possibly an undercurrent of allegorical meaning in this story; but, if so, it is sufficiently suppressed and vague for the purposes of realistic treatment, and serves to give only an undertone of destiny to the progress of events. The style in which the narrative is related is magnificently rhetorical, but lacks those resting places of simplicity and quiet that are as essential to interest as brilliant [brilliant] passages are. Mrs. Harriet Prescott Spofford is said to be the author of the work, and the literary style and the method of treatment, as well as the conception of the story, are both undisguisedly hers.


“A Modern Mephistopheles,” on the contrary [unlike Kismet], like some modern German frescoes, undertakes to compress within its outlines a significance of perhaps excessive pretensions as to profundity. It has exposed itself to the danger of being more allegorical than symbolic; two things often confounded with each other, but really widely apart. Symbolism offers only a part for the whole, and what it offers may be interpreted with a variety that opens sources of continually new enjoyment; but allegory tends to dryness, by attempting to condense in some unchanging form the utmost that can be found in a given theme or situation. Helwyze, in this strange story, has a hypertrophy of the intellect; he is an incarnation of cold, selfish deviltry, meant to be a humanized Mephistopheles. But he fails to take possession of one’s fancy, as Goethe’s devil does, because we are not free from a sort of moral responsibility, as we are in the case of the great German portrait of the negative spirit. We are constantly obliged to feel that Helwyze, without being really human, professes to be so. This throws an unmerited disgrace on our whole kind, and excites a desire to get hold of Helwyze and cultivate his moral nature a little, on our own account. Besides, Goethe’s Mephisto is not his hero; Helwyze really is the hero here, for the ostensible one, Canaris, is too loose and ignoble a bundle of passions to win our sympathy. In Helwyze, however, the author has endeavored to illustrate the baneful force of intellectual pride, and to show how this form of evil recoils upon itself. The wrong which the new Mephistopheles attempts to achieve is turned to right by the regenerating force of a pure woman’s heart and soul. She dies loving and beloved by Canaris, whom Helwyze had so long enslaved; her love supports Canaris under this loss, but Helwyze is completely crushed by it. “Life before was purgatory,” he exclaims; “now it is hell; because I loved her, and I have no hope to follow and find her again.” This sentence closes the tragedy, which, in spite of a fervid intensity of passion, does not seem quite to belong to the earth. The writer, nevertheless, deserves credit for a very uncommon vigor in producing and sustaining this supernatural combination; for, although it lies beyond experience and
the probable, it is still made consistent, and, as a whole, intelligible.

Burlingame, Edward L.  
North American Review  
no. 258  
(September–October 1877): 316–18.

“A Modern Mephistopheles” is an imaginative sketch, – more than half an allegory, – written with considerable grace of fancy, and with fair success in carrying out the spirit in which it was conceived. The unknown author – who, of whichever sex, writes in this instance with both the defects and merits of a woman’s pen – has given a new, fantastic dress to a world-old story, – a story that will suggest to its readers, as it does to its writer (so clearly that he feels, as it were, in duty bound to mention it), Retzsch’s familiar picture of “The Game of Life.”

Jasper Helwyze (whose name, by the way, is meant to fit him after the most approved models of the “Pilgrim’s Progress”) is seized by a sudden fancy to rescue and aid, for the ultimate purpose of a psychological experiment, a young author of whom he hears by accident, whom failure and privation have made desperate, and whom he interrupts in the midst of an attempt at suicide. The youth, Felix Canaris, accepts his new life eagerly, and in Helwyze’s luxurious home – such a “dream of luxury,” of course, as every writer has a prescriptive right to introduce into a story of this order, albeit architecture and the possibilities are thereby outraged – he blossoms into the beauty and vigor nature had meant him to possess, and want had hitherto kept from him. Full of all the possibilities of young manhood, he forms an admirable subject for the Mephistophelian designs of his protector; whose first desire, of course, is to gain over him a power from which he cannot well escape. The keen ambition of Canaris offers him a way. He offers to help the young author with the volume of poems he has dreamed of, yet failed to finish or to find success for. For a while Canaris labors on alone; but the inspiration will not come. Led by the stronger mind, he consents to the secret substitution of some poems by Helwyze for his own; the book comes out under Canaris’s name and makes him famous. From that day he is the slave of the “modern Mephistopheles.”

Naturally, we have not space or inclination to trace here the course of Helwyze’s experiments, whether on the mind of his chief victim, or on the minds of the only other two characters who enter into the fantastic little story. These two are women, – and the types of women necessary to make up what may be called the psychologic quadrilateral. One is Olivia, the “sumptuous beauty,” attracting all the sensuous part of Canaris’s nature, but herself absorbed in a devoted worship of the master-spirit, Helwyze. The other is called Gladys, the best-drawn character the book contains, whose appeal is to the young man’s better, more ideal side; the watching angel in his game.

The story is too lightly drawn to be judged by stern standards; and the delicacy of its execution entitles it to praise. Its little faults, and even a few absurdities, are of a kind to make it seem absurdly hypercritical to comment on them harshly. If Helwyze’s eyes are a little too intensely black and magnetic, if Olivia is a trifle too “sumptuous,” and “the villa,” as we intimated, magnificent beyond the power of all upholstery, why should we quarrel with the too liberal fancy that created them? “A Modern Mephistopheles” remains a fresh
and dainty fantasy; and this was all its author offered.

One effect produced upon the reader of “A Modern Mephistopheles” causes him involuntarily to compare the first and larger portion of the volume with the final chapters. At the outset, the tone is cold, the language narrative, Goethe’s conception is well paraphrased, the description of the characters is so analytic as to border upon irony; gradually the tone changes; the language is glowing, earnest, eloquent; the situations grow intensely dramatic, the similarity to the Faust of Goethe is less striking, and the end comes with a pathos so intense that the final pages seem almost to resolve themselves into a sob of pain. It is as though the author were struck at first simply with the fertility of his subject, but grew as he wrote into unconscious sympathy with it, and allowed his pages to become colored with the slow gradations of his changing mood. We cannot at the moment recollect anything more exquisite than the slow ripening of character in Gladys – the “woman-soul” dormant in the maiden; in the wife, roused to a sweet helpfulness and an intense capacity to love; in the mother, attaining its perfection – supreme in comprehension, in forgiveness, in unselfishness, in the completeness of the sacrifice of self. A study, rather than a novel, there is, nevertheless, enough of humanity to give it strength, enough of pathos to win it interest, enough of sin and of misery to make it life, enough of joy to relieve the darkness with little rifts of light.

‘A Modern Mephistopheles’ is, we suppose, so called because there is in the book no character who in the least resembles the immortal spirit of negation conceived and created by Goethe. As a story the work is certainly, to say the least, peculiar, with a plot that is somewhat odd, somewhat original, and frequently exceedingly ridiculous. A young Greek, Felix Canaris, being at the age of nineteen a disappointed poet, determines to destroy himself by charcoal, but is interrupted by the opportune arrival of the mysterious Jasper Helwyze, the modern Mephistopheles, who adopts him at once. A volume of poems soon appears bearing Canaris’ name, which win him a great reputation and the love of a delightful girl of eighteen, Gladys by name, who is the adopted child, apparently, of a mysterious, gorgeously beautiful middle-aged woman of the Cleopatra type, named Olivia, who is devoted to Helwyze. Canaris first falls in love with Olivia, but at length marries Gladys, and they live with Helwyze, who, in spite of being Mephistopheles, falls more or less in love with her. Matters get very complicated; there is a scene in which Gladys acts various scenes from the *Idyls of the King*, while under the influence of hasheesh, that is cleverly done. At last it turns out that Helwyze, not Canaris, was author of the poems that bore Canaris’ name, and Gladys, after preventing Canaris from poisoning Helwyze, dies in giving birth to a son. These, as well as the somewhat confused state of our mind after reading the work permits us to recollect, are the chief events of the story, which seems to belong chiefly to the “Ouida” school, and likely to
appeal only to those to whom that school is attractive.

[Danbury News?] ([1877?]). Clippings File.

This is a very good novel of its school, which is that of Mrs. Prescott Spofford and Miss Sheppard. It has so few musical raptures in it that it seems almost impossible for it to have been written by Miss Sheppard, and the style has certain faults which Mrs. Spofford has not shown for years. There are whole pages which read as if they must have been written by the former lady, and others which seem as if they must have fallen from the pen of the latter, but the name of Helwyze which belongs to one of the characters and several allusions to the “Scarlet Letter,” seem to stamp it as Julian Hawthorne’s. The plot is that of “Faust,” as far as the central thought of self-surrender to the evil principle for the sake of temporary good is concerned, but the Gretchen of the book is the hero’s wife, and she leaves him with the faint hope of winning his way to her in another world, although she dies while trying to save him in this. The story is powerful, but it holds the same relation to a really artistic novel like “Esmond” that a beautiful fairy spectacle holds to “Hamlet.” It is [is] pretty, exquisitely wrought, dainty and precious, but it is only filigree, and not solid, massive gold. It seems safe to predict that the book will have a greater popularity than any one of its five predecessors; it is more elaborate than “Is That All,” more exciting than “Kismet,” and better in every way than “Mercy Philbrick’s Choice” and “The Great Match.”

[Home Journal {Boston}]. Quoted in advertisement in ([1877?]). Clippings File.

It is a tale of great power, and the characters are drawn with almost painful vividness and wonderful skill.

New York Evening Post. Quoted in advertisement in ([1877?]). Clippings File.

The latest story published in the “No Name Series” is in some respects the best piece of work which the scheme has brought forth.”

***

Who is the author? In the first chapters we thought of Julian Hawthorne; a little later we were reminded of the author of “St. Elmo,” notwithstanding the absence of that lady’s customary parade of second-hand erudition. As we read on, the work became so much more sincere than anything that Mrs. Evans-Wilson has done that her shadow faded out of it, and before the reading was done we had settled upon Miss Fisher (Christian Reid) as the person most likely to have written the story. We frankly own, however, that this guess may be very wide of the mark, and the only thing of which we feel sure in the case is that the book is the work of a woman.

The story is not one to be read in idle moments, carelessly. Readers for mere amusement may even find it dull, but it
will repay the wiser reader who shall give it an earnest hour. He will not grow enthusiastic over it if he is critical, and we are certainly not enthusiastic in our admiration of it; but he will discover, as we do, that it is nevertheless better worth reading than most novels of the day are.

[New York newspaper?], ([1877?]). Clippings File.

The fifth book in the “No Name Series” is decidedly the best. All seem to agree that it is written by a woman, and conjecture has been rife as to whom the credit belongs. The style strongly suggests Harriet Prescott Spofford. The characters are only four in number, but they fill the book in a satisfying manner. Gladys, the heroine, is an exquisite creation. She seems the very incarnation of innocence, purity and truth, as the ensuing description will indicate: – “Through the shadowy hall there came a slender creature in a quaint white gown, who looked as if she might have stepped down from the marble Hebe’s pedestal . . . [remainder of sentence and the next omitted].” The idea of the story, as the title shows, is taken from Faust, and is exceedingly pathetic and beautiful. Some of the scenes are dramatic and intensely interesting. The descriptions are fine. There is a rare charm in the book which holds the reader spell-bound from the first page to the last. The characters are artistically contrasted, the purity of Gladys showing strikingly against the dark background of Helwyze’s Mephistophelean nature.

Canaris, the Faust of the story, is thus described: – “Youth lent its vigor to the well-knit frame, every limb of which was so perfectly proportioned that strength and grace were most harmoniously blended. [2 sentences omitted.]” It will readily be seen that this creature, as beautiful as a Greek god, is a fit mate for the lovely Gladys. They marry, and the wife redeems her husband by her devoted love, her rare and noble character, and then – dies.

It is to be hoped that there are not many such men as Helwyze, but that there are some who can doubt? One more brief extract and we have done. “Then Helwyze did an evil thing – a thing few men could or would have done. [5 sentences omitted.]” This act is to make her tell him a secret which he chooses to know. We will not spoil the reader’s interest by giving any more of the story.

[Ohio newspaper?], ([1877?]). Clippings File.

This latest of the “No Name Series” is also the most exciting. The introduction, in a verse from Faust, gives us the key-note of the story:

[“]The Indescribable,
Here it is done:
The woman-soul leadeth us
Upward and on!”

For Gladys, the lovely heroine, not so beautiful in person as truthful in spirit, leads upward, from the brink of a terrible abyss, the souls of both Felix Canaris, her husband, and Jasper Helwyze, his tempter, who is a singularly powerful delineation of the diabolical in human nature. Such a creation of reckless self-indulgence as this highly gifted and rarely cultured man – who finds his chief enjoyment in trifling with human emotions, in watching the throes and agonies of captured souls subjected to his will, even as a cat toys with the innocent animal in its possession – would
seem an exaggeration of reality, if parallel cases of indifference to human life and human torture were not frequent in the annals of history.

Yet independently of this central figure, who most markedly exhibits the peculiar metaphysical vigor of the book, the pages are rich and glowing in a voluptuous imagery of luxurious life in all its fascinating expressions of form, color and fragrance.

When Canaris is saved from suicide and taken by Helwyze to his palatial home, the beauty of the youth, fair as Narcissus, and the oriental grandeur of the surroundings, make a picture, as by some famous master, with which our memory refuses to part. When Olivia – the early love of Helwyze, who was disloyal to him, and is not a subject of his playful scorn, idolizing him whom she once rejected – when this superb tropical passion flower rises before us, we see a splendid and never-to-be-forgotten Judith, failing of her end, and a victim of cruel vengeance forever after. When Gladys partakes of hasheesh, unknowingly, at the suggestion of “the modern Mephistopheles,” and reveals through it the depth of her passionate love for Canaris – when she throws herself dramatically, at the bidding of Olivia as stage manager, into the tenderness of the neglected Enid, the abandon of the wily Vivien[,] the pathos of the “little nun” in her interview with Guinevere, and the exaltation of Elaine singing in a veiled voice, at once sad and solemn, the song of “Love and Death” – startling each listener with the shrill and impassioned cry at its close, we see her fall into the unconscious stage of the hasheesh dream, whose coming none can foretell but those accustomed to its use, and we believe thereafter that we have been with one who knows by experience the power of this marvelous narcotic; for the painting of the scene is not, cannot be imaginary, save in the lavish gorgeousness and piercing force of a diction which seems to pass almost beyond the pale of uninspired usage.

It would spoil the book for almost every reader to reveal more fully the workings of this tragic story, and we leave it, therefore, unspoiled, for each lover of sensational effects.

[[1877?]]. Clippings File.

A correspondent who has been reading “A Modern Mephistopheles” hazards the following guess as to the authorship: “A select ‘Investigating Committee’ respectfully submits the following guess concerning the author of ‘A Modern Mephistopheles’: That the story is a clever imitation of several well-known authors, intended to delude the public, that those in the secret may enjoy the joke. Mrs. H. P. Spofford is the most successful imitation, but Julian Hawthorne is well represented in some of the more brutal parts of this unpleasant tale; Miss Evans in the Gotama Buddha scene, Miss Alcott here and there when Gladys is described, and a hint of Dr. Holmes, with all the wit left out, in the psychological studies which recall ‘Elsie Venner.’ It is also suggested that two authors have tried their hands at the mystification. If so, what two?”


Roberts Bros. will soon publish a new edition of “A Modern Mephistopheles,”
The appearance of “A Modern Mephistopheles” with Miss Alcott’s name upon
the title-page, and with a hitherto un-
published story called “A Whisper in the
Dark” bound up in the same volume,
is a literary event of some considerable
importance. “A Modern Mephistopheles”
was one of the best novels in that re-
markable collection of American fiction
known as the No Name series. Miss
Alcott’s name has long been associated
with it, and, indeed, we believe she never
made any special effort to conceal the
authorship. It is in many respects her most
noteworthy effort, and by it her qualities
as a writer may safely be judged. The
novel is distinctly poetical in motive and
the imaginative power displayed in the
working out of the plot is to be classed
with that of the creative artists of litera-
ture. Three souls – nay, four – are here
unveiled to us, and while all are brought
into bold relief, the true strength of the
book undoubtedly lies in the portrayal
of Gladys, who is a genuine woman of
a fresh and original type. Helwyze is, of
course, frankly impossible, and Canaris
is only probable, while Olivia is a pictur-
esque foil; but in Gladys there is no incred-
ible or superfluous trait: she is thoroughly
and deliciously feminine. The moral lesson
is not to be ignored. Like the evil genius of
Faust, Helwyze sought to work evil, but the
forces that made for righteousness were
against him and he was defeated in the
very hour of his triumph. It is the recogni-
tion of the higher law controlling human
deeds that gives “A Modern Mephistophe-
les” its hold upon popular esteem. The
other tale, “A Whisper in the Dark,” is
eerie enough to set the nerves of the most
phlegmatic reader tingling. It is a tale of a
madhouse, where a beautiful girl is impris-
one by her artful guardian and all the
surroundings and accessories are brought
into harmony with the tragic purpose. The
style is rich and melodious and altoget-
ther the story may be accepted as a rare
specimen of the intense sort of fiction.

The Hartford Courant

A Modern Mephistopheles, by the late
Louisa M. Alcott, appears for the first time
under the name of the author. Several years
ago it was printed in the “No Name Se-
ries” and it is doubtful whether one of
her many readers recognized the merry
practical light-hearted writer of children’s
stories in this gloomy and mystical tale.
The leading idea is built on the story of
Faust, Helwyze the scholar, representing
the modern Mephistopheles, Gladys, Ma-
garet [Margaret], and Canaris, Faust[,] the
author however allows the justice of
fate to fall upon Helwyze, and Gladys
and Canaris though long under his spell
escape him by death, and a happy en-
trance into paradise, from which his evil
deeds will ever separate them. Totally un-
like other novels, we cannot judge of this
story by the rules that govern tales of so-
cial life and human interests. “A Mod-
ern Mephistopheles” is poetical and meta-
physical, and at the same time holds the
attention, though scarcely as an intellec-
tual performance. The second story, “A
Whisper in the Dark,” is more character-
istic of its author, but interesting to her
great congregation of readers because she
wrote it.

Boston Evening Traveller
45.23 (27 April 1889): [2]:5.

“A Modern Mephistophiles [Mephisto-
philes]” (Boston: Roberts Bros.), by the
late Louisa M. Alcott, is one of the best of her works. It appeared originally in the “No Name” series, but comes now practically as a new work and to a new circle of readers. It is quite probable that Miss Alcott’s fame as an author will in the end rest more on this novel than on any other she has written. It has more imagination, more of creative power, more plot, more scope. In this volume is also published for the first time a short tale of Miss Alcott’s, called “A Whisper in the Dark” – a story of a beautiful girl imprisoned in a private lunatic asylum by a guardian who desires the control of her property. The story is one of intense plot and tragic interest.


The first of the two stories in this volume was originally published in the “No Name Series” of novels, and attracted much attention. It is now republished with the author’s name, and with the addition of a short story, “A Whisper in the Dark,” left in manuscript at Miss Alcott’s death. As a writer of children’s books she had many gifts, and was nearly always successful. She knew the ways of young people, she had an intimate and loving sympathy with them, and she could interest and charm them by her stories. As a writer of novels, however, Miss Alcott was never more than moderately successful. Her plots were artificial, she had not an imagination sufficiently creative, and her characters were not clearly defined. These defects are fully shown in the present work, which is lacking in the subtle psychological analysis of character which the plot demands. The characters are puppets rather than living beings. The novel is also defective in that strength of imaginative conception needful for the representation of a modern Mephistopheles. In the whole book there is not one really admirable or lovable character. The book is the result of effort, a hot-house growth. It does not hold the attention of the reader or leave a marked impression. “A Whisper in the Dark” is a story of the incarceration in a mad-house of a sane woman and of her escape. It is too melodramatic to be real, and too artificial to be thoroughly interesting.

The Critic n.s. 11.284 (8 June 1889): 282.

One of the novels in the No Name Series which attracted most attention was ‘A Modern Mephistopheles,’ which, it was soon known, came from the pen of Louisa M. Alcott, and is now published with her name. It was highly praised when it first appeared and was pronounced a wise and subtle study of a great spiritual theme. The characters are none of them wholly attractive, but they are such as enabled the author to show how the old temptation and weakness have yet their place in the world. The admirers of Miss Alcott will joyfully add this strong story to the number of her novels; and they will find in it an expression of her womanly soul. A brief story left in MS. at her death has been added to the novel to make up the present volume. ‘A Whisper in the Dark’ is a sad and yet a vigorously written story.
Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices


MY GIRLS, VOL. 4 OF AUNT JO’S SCRAP-BAG (1878)
Another volume from “Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag,” this time for the sole and single benefit of the girls. In this little volume, which Roberts Brothers have just brought out, Miss Alcott says that she has been reproached with partiality in writing so much about boys, and some years ago she made a promise to redeem herself if she could find anything about girls worth recording. Since then she says that she has been studying girls, and has been both pleased and surprised to see how much they are doing for themselves now that their day has come. In her introduction she cites half a dozen cases of girls who have made their way, by sheer energy and self-reliance, over innumerable obstacles and obstructions to places of position and honor in the professions of medicine, art, the drama and law. We do not propose to say anything about the story itself that will dull the edge of the reader’s enjoyment. Everybody will read it, of course, and everybody will like it, of course, and wish there was more of it.

Louisa M. Alcott has produced from her inexhaustible “scrap-bag” another collection of short stories for which there is reason to be grateful. She needs no introduction and no commendation. What she chooses to write it is certain many will be eager to read. Whether it be short or long it will be healthy and good.

Once more we welcome Aunt Jo’s scrap-bag filled with novelties. It contains this time a dozen pleasant and cheery papers, in which there are words of encouragement for old and young, amusing records of foreign experiences, and fanciful glances at the “good old times” that we all like to have recalled. The book opens with a sketch called My Girls, in which Miss Alcott tells of the struggles of six young women who successfully made their way in the world in despite of the barriers erected by iron fortune. The author has – as our readers will doubtless remember – previously given an account of the agreeable boys she had known, and these girls she now introduces to the public will prove quite as desirable acquaintances and as deserving of love and esteem. Lost in a London Fog, which succeeds the record of feminine independence, is a very graphic description of the perplexities of two American ladies who inadvertently trusted their precious lives in a hansom cab, and with a cockney driver who had been imbibing too much British beer, or some other intoxicant. The remaining contents of the book will be found interesting, and all readers will, we are sure, be charmed with the little story entitled Roses and Forget-me-nots, and bettered by the lesson it teaches.
“Aunt Joe’s Scrap Book,” No. 4, by Louise M. Alcott, contains My Girls and other stories, “Lost in a London Fog,” “Little Neighbors,” “Old Major,” “The Autobiography of an Omnibus,” “Marjorie’s Three Gifts,” etc., the most of which we have heretofore encountered in St. Nicholas and elsewhere. No one is more happy than Miss Alcott in stories and essays for children, and it needs only to name one of her books to attract to it hundreds of Christmas purchasers.

The Commonwealth

– a new budget of such stories as only Miss Alcott can secure a royal patent for from the autocratic young folks . . .

The Springfield Daily Union (1 December 1877): 6:3.

Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag, No. 4, by Louisa M. Alcott, is a small book full of short stories, a dozen or so, for children, most or all of which, have previously been published separately. They are full of the brisk, healthful freshness, vivacity and naturalness that we always look for and always find in this author’s stories.


What a scrabble there will be among the little men and women to see who will first get their hands into Aunt Joe’s Scrap-Bag, for they know from past experience what dearly coveted treasure it holds. Aunt Joe’s pen never grows weary, and her fertile fancy never fails to please young readers. The new Scrap-Bag is brimful of stories fresh, bright and piquant. There are “My Girls,” which will inspire all girl-readers to live for a purpose, and to fashion out a career where their special gifts and tastes give promise of success and even distinction. “Lost in a London Fog,” which will convince them that wise women who can write delightful books are unwise enough to get into foolish difficulties; “The Boys’ Joke,” written for the benefit of the sterner sex; “The Roses and Forget-me-nots,” so pathetic and tender; “Patty’s Place,” so suggestive of helps and kindness to those who hold dependent positions. It is refreshing to call attention to a book sure to make its own way, and we can see Scrap-Bags full of Aunt Jo’s odds and ends, hanging up by the thousands, with twice as many little hands eagerly reaching out to gain possession.

[Bridgeport Standard?] ([1877?]). Clippings File.

This little volume contains twelve chapters of bright, interesting and instructive
matter for young and old, for it is a pecu-
liarity of Miss Alcott’s work that it suits all
ages about alike, and has qualities which
most every stage of intellectual develop-
ment appreciates and delights in. These
tales and sketches are intended for the
young, however, and for them they fur-
nish a never failing source of amusement
and instruction, for to love and read Miss
Alcott’s works is a liberal education for
any boy or girl. This volume will continue
“Aunt Joe,” in the favor of the rising gener-
ation, and also with those of older growth,
who know how to appreciate what is pure,
good, and improving for the eager, active
mind of youth.

D., C. H. [Caroline H.
Dall?]. ([1877]). Clippings
File.

Aunt Joe has pulled a lot of Christmas
scraps out of the bag, which has been filled
year after year by little trimmings of cir-
cumstance and life; little waste bits of ro-
mance or common-place, dropping from
her fateful shears. This time the girls have
all the fun, and there is always fun enough
when Aunt Joe is about. Dear Aunt Joe,
who is watching patiently now by the sick
bed of her nearest and dearest. Will not
the soft echoes of sweet youthful laughter
float above her even then, and make her
cross the easier to carry? God grant it.

([1877?]). Clippings File.

The holiday books for children are al-
most numberless, and their general merit
is much greater than in some former

years . . . Miss Alcott’s popularity con-
tinues unabated, and so does that of Mr
Trowbridge. The new volume of “Aunt
Jo’s Scrap-Bag” is the best of the whole se-
ries. It opens with a new story, “My Girls,”
written expressly for this book, and giv-
ing with little exaggeration the life and
fortunes of six young women of Miss Al-
cott’s acquaintance, whose portraits will
easily be recognized in Boston[.] One of
them, it is no harm to say, is her own sister,
Miss May Alcott, the artist, whose name
the newspapers persist in printing Mary,
and whose success in her chosen work has
been as romantic and almost as difficult as
that of Miss Alcott herself. There is noth-
ing more romantic in the world than the
fortunes of American girls, and the won-
der is that novelists have not sooner found
this out, as they are now beginning to do.
There is also an uncounted treasure of tal-
ents in the mind and heart of American
women, which has begun to manifest it-
self distinctly in art and literature, and in
the practical affairs of life.

The Literary World 8
(January 1878): 142.

Miss Alcott has written nothing for a long
time past which strikes us so agreeably
as her bright little Christmas greeting, My
Girls, fourth in the Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag
Series. There is hardly a chapter in this
small collection which does not wake the
impulse toward unselfish service for oth-
ers, and sweet and wholesome kindliness.
“Major” will appeal more to the hearts of
children than half a hundred reports of So-
cieties for the Prevention of Cruelty to An-
imals, while no one who knows, even by
report, the author, and that united home
over which so sad a shadow has lately
fallen, will be able to read, without a throb
of sympathy, the tender little sketch called “One Happy Birthday.”

Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag, Vol. IV. (My Girls, etc.), published by Messrs. Roberts Brothers, Boston, is the fourth book in this deservedly popular series of short stories by Miss Louisa M. Alcott. The tales are full of freshness, humor, and wholesome thought, with inimitable touches of playful fancy and tenderness such as have established Miss Alcott’s loving rule over the hearts of her readers. Boys as well as girls will find plenty to enjoy in these twelve delightful scraps from Aunt Jo’s bag, and, but readers of St. Nicholas need no recommendation to them of anything that Miss Alcott has written. There are some pretty illustrations to the book, and the price is one dollar.


Miss Alcott gives us another characteristic volume of scraps from Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag (Roberts Brothers).

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

The Independent 29.1513 (29 November 1877): 10:3.
Zion’s Herald 54.49 (6 December 1877): 386:7.
UNDER THE LILACS (1878)
“Miss Alcott’s New Story.” ([October 1877?]). Clippings File.

“Under the Lilacs,” a new serial story, by Louisa M. Alcott, will begin in the November number of *St. Nicholas*, and continue through the coming volume. This announcement alone should insure for *St. Nicholas* a place in every family circle. No living writer gives us purer, fresher and more healthful stories than Miss Alcott, and no other stories have such charms for young people as have hers.

“St. Nicholas.” ([September–October 1878?]). Clippings File.

The Fifth Volume [of *St. Nicholas*] and “Under the Lilacs” come to an end together. While in regard to a large portion of people whom we know, we are unable to see why they were allowed to enter the world, we are quite clear that Miss Louisa Alcott was created expressly to write stories for young people.

Book Exchange Weekly (October [1878]). Clippings File.

Miss Alcott’s latest story, “Under the Lilacs,” has already won its place of favor, while publishing as a serial story in *St. Nicholas*.[...] We have followed the course of the story somewhat in our comments from month to month on the magazine, and we have said what we say again with the fullest confidence, that “Under the Lilacs” is the very best of Miss Alcott’s books, better even than “Little Women.” It is the story of a wandering circus boy, and the friends who took him to their hearts in the time of his sorest distress. Ben, the circus boy, is a new and particularly interesting figure in juvenile fiction; while Miss Celia, if not so new, is a personage worthy of a place in fiction that is not juvenile.


Miss Alcott is never so much at home as when she writes for children; and in her children’s story-books she seems to have an endless variety of character and incident, and to write with very little effort. No doubt the labor is there, and sometimes a severe and irksome labor, – to invent scenes, to imagine dialogues, to create the small personages who hop, skip and jump through the amusing chapters, – but there is seldom any appearance of task-work. On the contrary, the books run along in a rather hap-hazard way, taking their turn and following their cue from chance, rather than from study and design. Such, at any rate, is the quality of “Under the Lilacs,” which Roberts is just publishing in a volume of 305 pages, with a few wood-engravings, not all the same as those which illustrated her chapters in “St Nicholas.” There is the same watchful and rigid moral tone which shows itself in
Miss Alcott’s books, by the frequent reminder of what virtue is and what it is not; but, for all that, the moral does not seem to drag the story along with it, like a horse caught in a lasso. It is an accompaniment, rather than the main thing, and there are so many divergences from the strait and narrow road in which good little boys and girls are made to travel by Miss Edgeworth, by Jacob Abbott, and by other writers of story-books — that fault has been found with Miss Alcott for this very freedom which she uses. Especially in her dialogues, it is complained that she permits girls to talk in something like slang, and with an occasional inelegance that shocks the careful mamma. This may be so, — for conformity to rule, or to what is expected, is not Miss Alcott’s most marked trait; on the contrary, she follows a method of her own, and makes her small world follow a morality and an etiquette that agrees with her own ideas. That this is satisfactory to the public sufficiently appears by the popularity of her books; that it is also in the interest of genuine good morals and good manners, upon the whole, is also evident to those who read her books with this subject in their thoughts. Very few of her readers do this, probably, — being drawn on insensibly until they lose their critical faculty in the interest which the story itself excites.

This is true of “Under the Lilacs.” The story is a very simple one, — the plot is slender and the main incidents are few, — but the succession of events and the amusement or wonder aroused by the story soon gives the reader a strong desire to know how it will turn out and what will happen next. Will that amusing and pathetic dog ever be found? How will Ben Brown get down from the maple tree? Who will win at the shooting-match? These and such as these are the thrilling questions that “quicken the pulse and suffuse the eyes,” as Webster said about a visit to the battle-field of Marathon. The test of a good writer is that he makes any trivial matter important and interesting, — and this test Miss Alcott never fails to pass. More than this, she lets her sympathy with the unfortunate and her regard for what is best appear so constantly in the most trivial details, that the heart is touched and the imagination kindled so that a very small matter looks almost epic in its proportions. Then, without being perfect in her management of the dialogue, she is so naturally dramatic that what is said and done by her personages brings them before us with a life-like reality, and we laugh and cry over them as we do at a good play. All this is said by way of accounting for the effect which Miss Alcott’s books produce, — for we are not prepared, off-hand, to expect that they will be as good as we find they are. Shall I add one other thing, then, to account for a success the more flattering because it is always a little unexpected? There is in her books — foreign as they may seem to the high spiritual doctrines of her father and the other early transcendentalists — something of that perception of the grand in the petty, the invisible in the every-day object, the ineffable in the every-day chatter of life, which gives an exaltation beyond the highest intellectual achievement.

“Seek not beyond thy cottage wall
Redeemers that can yield thee all:
...” [10 lines omitted.]

Templeton. Hartford Daily Courant 42.248
(21 October 1878): [1]:8.

There are large advance orders for Miss Alcott’s “Under the Lilacs,” which comes
from Roberts Brothers of course. The demand for all her works continues as large as that for the writings of any American author, and her publishers have paid her enough in copyrights to make her independent for life. Miss Alcott is probably the author of “Gemini” in the No Name series, a very good novel; but she finds her greatest popularity in stories like “Under the Lilacs”.

**Boston Evening Transcript**

541.15,803 (23 October 1878): 6:1.

It makes little difference whether Miss Alcott writes a book for grown people or for children; both are sure to read it and both equally enjoy it. “Under the Lilacs,” which for the past year has been running through the pages of St. Nicholas, constituting one of the chief attractions of that magazine, has been brought out in a handsome little volume by Roberts Brothers, uniform in style with “Little Women,” “An Old Fashioned Girl,” and other works by the same author. The central figure in the story is little Ben Brown, a runaway circus boy, who makes his appearance at the house “under the lilacs” in one of the first chapters, in a ragged and half-starved condition. With him is his trick dog Sancho, a remarkably intelligent animal, whose training in the ring amounts to a liberal education. Benny is taken into the family, and in spite of the impress which his former mode of life has made upon him, develops into a faithful, trustworthy boy. The story is full of action, and though its main interest centres in Benny, girl readers will find it as enjoyable as if it had been written especially for their benefit.

**The Boston Post**


With the children of New England, Louisa Alcott is a household name. Her “Little Women[,]” “An Old Fashioned Girl” and other books have delighted the children, and they are ever on the alert for her announcement of something new. The advent of “Under the Lilacs” will be joyful news to the young folks around many a hearthstone, and many a smiling face on peering into the capacious stocking on Christmas morn will find “Under the Lilacs” snugly stowed away, the gift of a loving mother or some other member of the household. It would not be at all surprising if all the children for whom it was especially written had read it through and through long before the Christmas season, so popular are Miss Alcott’s stories with the children. Well, “Under the Lilacs” is a nice story. The hero is a little boy who has deserted a travelling circus with which he had been connected, deserted it because of the ill-treatment to which he was subjected. The little fellow seeks out a home, and he finds one – a nice one, too – and lots of pleasant friends. He also has a dog, faithful little Ben [Sancho], who is a hero also, and knows almost as much as his master. The rest of the story we will leave for the boys and girls to find out.

**Hartford Daily Courant**

52.252 (25 October 1878): [1]:7.

No man writes more to the satisfaction of children than Louise Alcott, and to
no one’s guidance would parents more willingly surrender their children. Her latest story, Under the Lilacs, which has been so popular in the St. Nicholas, is now published in a neat volume, which will be a prime favorite in the holidays.

**The Publishers’ Weekly**
14.17 (26 October 1878): 506.

A little boy who runs away from a circus troupe, where he has been badly treated, is the hero of this story. Worn out with fatigue and hunger, he hides in an uninhabited house, and is found there with his dog by the good woman who takes charge of the mansion in the absence of its owner. She and her two little girls, Bab and Betty, live in a little cottage at the gate, and here poor Ben Brown is carried, and fed and cared for. Ben and his dog Sancho, a curly, white poodle, that has been taught all kinds of amusing tricks, are the salient figures in the landscape, from this out. They reluctantly give up the ring and sawdust, and become respectable members of society. The old house is re-opened, and its charming owner takes a sisterly interest in Ben, and promotes him to her own service. Ben has some sorrows, but on the whole gets much pleasure out of life. Ben, Bab and Betty, and Sancho the dog, are most charming pictures. They dance through the volume, enlivening every page with their reckless love of fun and adventure. Altogether one of the loveliest children’s books we have read.

**“Under the Lilacs.”**
*Boston Courier* 55.35 (27 October 1878): 4:3.

Miss Louisa Alcott’s book, Under the Lilacs (Roberts Brothers) is certainly a very fascinating story. We may think that the two principal female figures are rather childish in behavior for their years, we may question the wisdom in a book for young people, who are not supposed to be readers of Nicholas Nickleby of making a casual comparison with “those dear little Kenwigses;” but we must admit that the author has the child’s heart within the woman’s, and that she knows how to create very charming and natural types of girlhood and boyhood. Bab and Betty are well individualized, and Ben Brown, the runaway circus boy, has a spice of originality about him that will place him in the foremost rank of juvenile heroes; while Sancho, his trick dog, will be almost as great a favorite as his master.


It is dedicated “to Emma, Ida, Carl and Lina, over the sea, by their new friend and sister,” and we doubt not is destined to delight thousands of children in foreign lands as well as in this country. It is needless to say that this story possesses all the charm of the previous stories of the same author. It is difficult to say in just what it lies, but it certainly is there.
We have no more delightful writer of stories for the young than Miss Louisa M. Alcott, whose name as the author of ‘Little men’ and ‘Little women’ is endeared in many and many a household. She writes with a naturalness quite her own, and the sprightliness and vigour of her style often commend her books to older readers. ‘Under the Lilacs,’ is her latest story, and it displays fully as much ability and grasp of character as any of her previous books. The romance is skilfully and gracefully told, and while a moral is pointed, the absence of ‘goody-goody’ padding is quite conspicuous. ‘Under the Lilacs’ traces the history of a fatherless circus boy, and we are introduced to a number of pleasant people, and a variety of incidents of some moment. The story is told with real dramatic effect and cannot fail to create a genuine impression for good on the reader. It is not full of dry details or uninteresting verbiage, but every line sparkles with interest and reflected light from the author’s genius.

Miss Louisa M. Alcott’s new story, Under the Lilacs, has for its hero a small boy, who has run away from a travelling circus, where he was ill treated, and who finds friends and a happy home. He has a small dog named “Sancho,” who is wonderful indeed, and quite as much of a hero as “Ben” himself; and then there are two little girls, and a very sweet lady, and several other attractive characters. Like all of the author’s works, it is natural, charming, and of interest to old and young, particularly to the latter, who will not rest quiet, we fear, without its possession. It is a benediction for the holidays.

The readers of the St. Nicholas are already acquainted with the fortunes of Ben and
Sancho, Bob and Betty, Sam, Celia, and the rest of the young people who are gathered into this charming story. Now that the story has become a book, it will renew the pleasure of thousands who have read it once, and to thousands more may bring fresh pleasure and profit. There is adventure enough in it to keep the attention of the most wide-awake boys and girls, and enough sweet temper and good feeling to infect them with that good health of the mind which is always so marked a characteristic of Miss Alcott’s books.

Roberts & Brothers have issued another little volume from the bright and child-loving pen of Miss L. M. Alcott. It is entitled, Under the Lilacs, and records the remarkable and amusing process of civilizing and introducing into polite life a very intelligent, but utterly uncultivated, circus boy. The telling of the story is the wonderful thing about the book; and this is inimitable.

The simple events of juvenile life are here transformed into gold and pearls for the delectation of the young folk who have already learned the magic charm of the author’s pen. Miss Alcott’s stores of entertainment for the flaxen-haired young-
death of his father sobers him, and his aim is thenceforth to be “respectable.” The loss of his poodle, Sancho, when the hero is tempted to visit a travelling circus, forms one of the principal episodes in the book, and when he is at last found again, but dyed black, and shorn of his beautiful tail, which he was in the habit of holding in his paw (we had almost written hand) whilst waltzing, the joy of all the little and big people in the book is fully shared by the reader. After this episode Ben’s progress in the paths of respectability, which, in Miss Alcott’s hands, never means dulness, is as rapid as it is constant; and, when his father returns safe and sound to settle down as an ostler in the town, his happiness is complete. This delightful book winds up, as all books should, with a double marriage “under the lilacs.”

The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art 46.1205 (30 November 1878): 700.

The children who have been delighted with Little Women and Good Wives will be no less pleased with Under the Lilacs. The hero, Ben, is an escaped circus boy, who arrives, weary and footsore, at the lodge of a great house, accompanied by his performing dog Sancho. The pair are kindly received by Mrs. Moss and her two little girls, Bab and Betty, and are watched over by Miss Celia, who lives at the manor. The account of Ben’s first church-going is very graphic. To keep him quiet, and at the same time to prevent him from “nestling round” during the sermon, Miss Celia gives him a book of Scripture narratives, in which Ben, deeply interested, takes a picture of David and Goliath for that of Jack the Giant Killer and Cormoran. The children are thoroughly childlike and healthyminded, as all Miss Alcott’s children are; though of course, to an English mind, the social relations of the characters are somewhat strange. Not the least interesting personage is Sancho. The story of his loss by the children, when they have run away to see the circus, and his discovery some weeks later, dyed, dirty, and with a clipped tail, and of his grief when he found he could no longer waltz with his tail in his mouth, is really most pathetic. We hope many children this Christmas will enjoy his adventures.


Miss Alcott is supreme in the domain of juvenile literature. No other writer for the edification and amusement of the children surpasses her in knowledge of the minds and natures for which she caters. “Under the Lilacs” will be well received by the little people, in whose interest it has been written.


Pure, graceful, and heartily entertaining.
Miss Alcott has found her way to the hearts of so many young English readers that the sight of a new story from her pen is sure to create lively anticipations of pleasure. We will say at once that “Under the Lilacs” will satisfy the author’s most ardent admirers.

They will be lucky girls and boys who find “Under the Lilacs” among their Christmas gifts.


*Under the Lilacs* is a stupid and vulgar story “for young people,” though not very likely to find favour with them. The illustrations are, however, much superior to the letterpress, and some of them possess considerable merit.

Sacramento Union.
Quoted in advertisement ([1878?]). Clippings File.

A new book by Miss Alcott, for the young folks, is always received with a joyful welcome. She preaches to great audiences whenever she takes up her pen, and her storehouse of originality seems exhaustless. No woman could write as she does for children if she did not love them. Love flows from every page, gentleness from every line, truth from every sentence. The lady wields a magic pen, and binds her little readers to her by bonds that cannot be broken. “Under the Lilacs” is probably her best book. It is full of sympathy, loving kindness and encouragement, and is so well handled as to plot, detail and activities, as to rivet the attention of young readers and make on their minds ineffaceable impressions for good.

The rapidly increasing number of those who devote themselves to writing children’s books is certainly a hopeful and encouraging sign of an increasing interest in the welfare of childhood. It must at the same time be admitted that much of the literature of this class is extremely silly and useless. There are comparatively few who succeed in writing really good books for children. But among them Miss Louisa M. Alcott holds a foremost place. Her latest work of this description, “Under the Lilacs,” has just been published in a handsome style by Roberts Brothers, Boston. It is full of interesting incident, calculated to strengthen both the mind and heart of young people. The style is vivacious, pure, healthy and strong. She has the rare charm of imparting to her stories a fascinating and attractive interest, which produces a deep and abiding impression, such as cannot fail to give strength to the moral sense and enlighten the sympathies. “Under the Lilacs” should find its way into every household.

Miss Alcott has won a wide circle of readers. The hero of her new story is a circus boy, who escapes from his oppressors and finds a shelter in a manor-house. Here he comes into contact with other children, and with her usual felicity in describing child life, Miss Alcott tells his adventures and those of his dog. It is a clever story, and will take the first rank among Christmas favourites.

Harper’s New Monthly Magazine 58.345 (February 1879): 469.

Miss Alcott’s *Under the Lilacs* (Roberts Brothers) is one of the best boys’ and girls’ stories that has yet flowed from her facile pen. The wonderful dog and his master the runaway circus boy, who figure in its pages and divide the interest with their kind-hearted girl friends Bab and Betty, and a charming Lady Bountiful, will strike the fancy of all genuine boys and girls, and set their thoughts as well as their tongues industriously at work.


The authoress of “Little Women” is always charming. Her half dozen books, written especially for children have found quite as many readers and admirers among maturer folks. No one will be able to take up “Under the Lilacs” and lay it down without finding out what finally becomes of Ben “the circus boy” and his charming dog, Sancho.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices


JIMMY’S CRUISE IN THE PINAFORE, VOL. 5 OF AUNT JO’S SCRAP-BAG (1879)
“Aunt Jo” has again dipped her hand into her “Scrapbag,” and the result is a delightful volume of sketches, the leading one of which, “Jimmy’s Cruise in the Pinafore,” has already been made familiar to many readers through the pages of last month’s St. Nicholas. Beside this one there are twelve others, every bit as entertaining. Among their titles are “Seven Black Cats,” “How They Camped Out,” “What a Shawl Did,” “Kitty’s Cattle Show,” “Rosa’s Tale,” and others which our young readers will find out fast enough. The volume is brought out in Roberts Brothers’ best style, uniform with Miss Alcott’s former books, and has all the “Pinafore” illustrations.

This is No. 5 of that wonderful scrap-bag collection. It tells of the Pinafore, and a dozen other amusing things that the little people will be glad enough to read, and tells them as only the author of “Little Women” can.

There are thirteen of these stories, and they will all find warm endorsement from the little folks. It is a book to sell by the thousands, and each possessor may account himself lucky. The title-story is illustrated by eight pictures of “Pinafore” characters, and is very cheery in itself.

Miss Alcott’s volume is a collection of children’s stories from the more youthful magazines, to which the first story, “Jimmy’s Cruise on the Pinafore,” furnishes a title. They are in her best manner, and the book is eagerly read by those for whom it is designed. Miss Alcott is now engaged on a larger work, which will soon begin to appear serially.

Miss Alcott’s latest volume in “Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag” series, is *Jimmy’s Cruise in the Pinafore*, with a dozen other short stories, many of which have already delighted the children in *St. Nicholas*. It is only necessary to announce one of Miss Alcott’s books, for all the children know their friend.
Thirteen sketches to be added to the many pleasures for which in the name of all the children we thank the author, who knows so well how to do these things. Yet while the fun of Pinafore is of an innocent sort, parents must grow sober over the question whether it is best to multiply the attractions which make it so hard to hold the young in these times to any sort of study or work, and which threaten the still greater evil of making any serious conception of life impossible.

Miss Alcott is on hand once more with her Scrap-bag for the coming holidays. Children will be delighted when they learn that the leading story relates the adventures of a little Boston boy, who sang in the famous Pinafore, in which youthful actors at the Boston Museum won great renown. There are twelve other stories, full of fun, adventure and jolly good times, while at the same time they show that the young folks are the happiest who try to make others happy, and that those who learn to control their tempers have gained the victory in a great battle. The volume is a treasure house of amusement and good advice, given in the bright and cheerful style which makes the author always acceptable to legions of readers.

There can be no pleasanter announcement for little folks than that of a new volume, the fifth, of Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag. It contains a baker’s dozen of short stories, including “Jimmy’s Cruise in the Pinafore,” and all of them told in the style the children love, and of which Miss Alcott is a master.

For children of the same age [as the audience for Eyebright], or those a little older, may be named Miss Alcott’s latest collection, headed by “Jimmy’s Cruise in the Pinafore,” and including a baker’s dozen of short stories. They are all characterized by Miss Alcott’s good nature, and if life seen through them looks rosy, there is no harmful distortion. Nevertheless, we think children old enough to read these stories would not get more than a passing entertainment out of them, with one or two hints of helpfulness. But there are times when pleasure, even more than instruction, is necessary for a child, and the interest of Miss Alcott’s books does not seem to be impaired, even by her noticeable carelessness of style.
These stories are good enough as suggestions, but are too slight to merit a long notice. The one to which the book owes its name turns the craze for Pinafore to account.

The fifth volume of Miss Alcott’s “Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag” (Roberts Bros.) consists of short stories that have, apparently, appeared elsewhere in juvenile periodicals. They are of the class which confirm our distrust of such publications as wholesome family reading. Against the unreal and sentimental writing in them the child has no protection from month to month. Gathered into a volume the judicious parent can avert it – when it is too late.

Jimmy is a little boy who turns an honest penny in company with other children by acting Pinafore – an idea which has been taken hold of by a London company, and is to be one of the rival attractions to the pantomime. The story is a short one; but there are several much better ones in the volume, which is full of proofs that Miss Alcott’s charm of writing has not diminished. The stories are not all for children, though they would understand most of them; but their elders may learn a good lesson from “What a Shovel Did,” and old and young will both like “What Becomes of the Pins.”

When you buy books for your girls and boys select those which will both interest and instruct, and there are authors who have the gift of being able to do this without the appearance of preaching. A writer says of Miss Alcott’s books: “In all of them, underlying the main story and never thrust into a disagreeable prominence, burns the one great keynote of success, self-reliance, and clustered around it are purity, kindness, faith, and endeavor.” . . . Miss Alcott’s new book for this autumn is “Jimmy’s Cruise in the Pinafore” and other stories.

A collection of short stories, the first of which gives its title to the book. Jimmy
is a Boston boy who, with his widowed mother, works hard to support the family, and especially to send for sea air an invalid sister. He is fortunate enough to get engaged as a sailor-boy, for the performance of H. M. S. Pinafore [sic], at a Boston theatre, for which he gets ten dollars a week. Miss Alcott’s stories are all full of right feeling, and are attractive and good reading.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

Ever since “Little Women” was written, Miss Alcott has been regarded as the queen of American story-tellers, and every succeeding book from her pen has achieved and held a wonderful popularity. “Little Men,” “An Old-fashioned Girl,” “Eight Cousins,” and “Rose in Bloom,” have one after the other won the hearts of old as well as young readers, and now comes another, the latest, and we presume a large class of boy readers will maintain, the best of all – “Jack and Jill.” The principal characters are a group of rather boisterous school-boys, although there is a pleasant mixture of grown folks and girls in the story. It will interest readers to know that “Harmony Village” is Concord, and that the places described are for the most part real places. Whether the boys and girls are “real boys and girls” we cannot say, but they act and talk as if they might be. The volume is issued by Roberts Brothers in the same style as “Little Women” and the rest of Miss Alcott’s books, and is illustrated.

Miss Alcott’s story is the best she has written for years. I have heard many put it fully on a par with “Little Men” and “Little Women,” and some say it is even better than those, the most successful books of the last twenty years. There is no doubt that she is in her brightest and most popular vein in “Jack and Jill.” It has all the qualities with which she has so successfully appealed to the heart and the imagination of children, and which have made the better class of her writings very fascinating to older people as well. Miss Alcott is probably the most popular American woman now writing. She lives in Boston of late, is in good health, and is one of those women whom age improves in appearance.

Taking the old nursery rhyme of Jack and Jill as a text, Miss Alcott has built up on this slender material a very interesting tale for boys and girls, in which a year in the life of some young people in Harmony Village is depicted with much vivacity and strength. The story opens with a coasting scene where the hero and heroine came to grief by falling over a bank, through their own foolhardiness. The long illness which resulted to both from this escapade is described with much fullness in these pages, and the incidents which happened in their sick chambers, including the means by which they communicated with each other, are related in a manner that will make young readers wish that they could enjoy the pleasures of an invalid without the pains. The story is not, however, allowed to grow monotonous by being confined within narrow limits, for it includes adventures by the seashore and on the river, and is enlivened by the doings of a dramatic and debating club, and by the jollities of Christmas festivities. It is one of
the brightest of Miss Alcott’s recent efforts, and the children who figure in it promise to become quite as warm friends of the juvenile reading world as Little Men and Little Women. All of the characters have a distinct individuality, and illustrate the value of appreciating the “use and beauty of the small duties, joys and sorrows which make up our lives.”

**The Christian Register**


It is sufficient to say that Miss Alcott has published a new book to make its sale certain. There is no writer of children’s books whose style of thought and method we can more heartily commend. We have read her books with the children constantly in mind, and have seldom found a word which we could object to, never one that was false in tone or temper. Jack and Jill will take its place among the favorites.

**The New-York Times**


Was there ever such a happy village as Harmony? If we of maturer years doubt that there ever could have been such a delightful place, that is no reason why our children should not believe that Harmony has an existence. Indeed, it would not be difficult for them to place Harmony in a certain State, county, and township, for Miss Alcott describes it so naturally, makes her lads and lasses so manly, good, and honest, that it were a pity that there ever should be any doubting about it at all. If there be some special gift in writing stories for children, the author of “Jack and Jill” possesses it in a most marked degree. It is the test of a story of this kind if it can be read by the grown reader with as much interest as when younger eyes devour its pages. There is a tenderness, a sweetness, a peculiar gentleness about Miss Alcott’s works which we really think no one else has. There runs no vein of over-sentimentalism in her books, for, with a rare insight into a boy’s nature, she rather likes to describe him as having strong masculine traits. The story of “Jack and Jill” is of a boy and girl, who meet at the same time, on the same sled, with an accident. Jill had her back badly hurt, and Jack breaks his leg. Right off you are thrown in with “solemn Frank, long Gus, gallant Ed, fly-away Molly Loo, pretty Laura and Lotty, grumpy Joe, sweet-faced Merry, gay Jack, and gypsy Jill,” and for a year you stay with these boys and girls, and really have “a good time” of it.

On the sledge “Thunderbolt,” Jack and Jill take their last “go bang.” Jack is not afraid, but would rather not have taken Jill, but she insisted, and they crash through the bars of a fence, and a boy and a girl, sadly hurt, are taken in Farmer Gray’s ox-cart to their respective homes. Jack is put to bed, and so is Jill, but they live not far apart. At once a telegraph is established by means of a clothes-line and a basket, and communication is established which is of the most amusing kind. Jill’s mother is poor. Jack’s is rich, and Mrs. Minot has Jill brought to her house. It is a trial of patience with both the children, but their sterling qualities act as a leaven among the rest of the children. That pleasant humor of Miss Alcott is quite noticeable in Molly Loo’s little brother Boo, so called because he always is crying. Once they had an agricultural fair in Harmony,
and Boo was to be exhibited as the prize fat boy, “a threat which so alarmed the innocent that he ran away, and was found two or three miles from home, asleep under the wall, with two seed-cakes and a pair of socks done up in a bundle.” Miss Alcott is not afraid of putting in the moral. When she does it it is always neatly and clearly expressed, and is doubtlessly effective. “You can make things go,” says Frank, “as you want them, if you only try hard enough, and walk right over whatever stands in your way.” Sometimes, as oldish men cast retrospective glances at the books of their boyish days, there comes the wish that stories such as Miss Alcott writes had been printed just 40 years ago.

**Zion’s Herald 57.43**  

It is full of the sayings and doings of natural, human children, told as only the author of “Little Men” and “Little Women” can.

**The Commonwealth**  
(23 October 1880): [1]:5.

In *Jack and Jill, a Village Story*, by Louisa M. Alcott, we have her latest magazine story, in parts, collected in a handsome volume. Like all her stories, there is no word to be omitted, none to be criticised in regard to its propriety, but throughout a sweet and elevating influence for the young minds for which it is intended – the happy teacher of a still happier constituency of readers.

**The Literary World 11.22**  
(23 October 1880): 373.

*Jack and Jill* [Roberts Bros., Boston. $1.50.] is in the quieter key to which Miss Alcott’s later stories have been set. There is no event in the book more sensational than the spill from a sled in which the young hero and heroine injure, one his leg, and the other her back; but it has plenty of life and movement, and a great deal of solid, good teaching of a helpful, healthy kind, administered both directly and indirectly, and in a deft and agreeable manner. Children will enjoy the story; but no child will finish it without being conscious of unrestrained impulse in the direction of what is right and sweet.

**[Sanborn, Franklin B.?].**  
Excerpt from “Our Boston Literary Letter.”  

Sitting down the other day to begin a notice of Miss Alcott and her latest book, word came to me that Mrs Child was dead . . .

Miss Alcott, who has inherited many of her mother’s qualities, is perhaps also the best inheritor of Mrs Child’s reputation in literature, though her province is so different. Mrs Child wrote for children at one period, as Miss Alcott has done so continually; but she early diverged into paths that led her among the studies and pursuits of men. She had a better style than
Miss Alcott has ever attained, – but, on the other hand, Miss Alcott has far more fertility of wit and dramatic power than Mrs Child, though the latter was not deficient in those qualities. Mrs Child was thrown by circumstance, and also by her temperament, more into the front of the social and political agitation then going forward, than Miss Alcott ever has been, or, apparently, ever will be. She was also of a more social and political turn by nature, and, with all her individuality, was more inclined to march in line with other persons. Miss Alcott like most of her sex, does not drill very well, – as Teufelsdrickh says, *Das Weib kind wird nicht dressiren* – or words to that effect – while Mrs Child was quite as capable of "dressing" in the military sense, as most of the emancipationists with whom she ranked herself. This undisciplined quality of spirit makes it much harder than it otherwise would be to assign Miss Alcott her due place in literature. Most of the Concord authors are a little hard to classify, either through excess or defect of genius, and Miss Alcott, who has been the most popular of them all, is perhaps the hardest of all to place properly in rank. She does not yet vindicate her claim to a high place in permanent literature, – nor yet has she the fatal transitoriness of so many who become popular authors. She touches the heart, which no amount of mere talent can effect, – while her subjects and her manner of dealing with them seem to forbid to her the title of genius, which we would be glad to allow her. She belongs, perhaps in the region where Defoe’s work places him, though she lacks the consummate literary art which Defoe would use when it pleased God, – for he does not seem always to have been master of it. A feminine and American Defoe is what we may best call Miss Alcott, if it is necessary to use comparisons and classify her. It is time now that she should turn her pen to more serious and connected literary work than she has hitherto undertaken, – the connection between her stories thus far being merely that they were drawn from experiences in her own life and that of her family and friends. A wider horizon now invites her, and she has the requisite facility and breadth of observation to occupy it, if she proves to possess the generalizing faculty, which in Mrs Child was well developed, and in Defoe existed in marvelous activity, though he exercised it too often, on the pettiest subjects, as is wont to happen with journalists and pamphleteers.

Miss Alcott’s “Jack and Jill” is the story of school-boy life in Concord village, and adheres very closely to its text. The exact places and persons are delineated, the names only being changed, – and the success of the book is evident from the interest with which boys and girls peruse it, and keep reading it over. It is the whole village chronicle for school-children which is here related, and they have the satisfaction of thinking that it all really happened to somebody. This element of reality – not realism, which has come to have a bad significance, like “free thinking” – is one of the attractions in Miss Alcott’s books, and it is in this specially that she resembles Defoe. The talk of her character is not so real, though spirited and witty, – for children do not moralize quite so much in actual life as in these tales of Miss Alcott. They like better to be moralized by others than to do it themselves, especially to each other. Hence they take pleasure, I have found, in the pathos and sentiment of Mrs L. C. Moulton’s “Bed-time Stories” of which a new volume has appeared, coincident in time and general aspect with “Jack and Jill.” Mrs Moulton’s stories have some merits which Miss Alcott’s have not, – a more agreeable literary manner, for one thing, – but they appeal less forcibly to the childish heart and mind, and they do not sell so fast. Miss Alcott’s volumes do not now have the rapid sale they enjoyed before the
“hard times,” but they sell well, and I do not find the interest which young people have in them is at all abated. Wherever any one goes who can tell anything about Miss Alcott and the originals of her characters, he is closely questioned on those points, as I know from experience. Mr Alcott himself, with all his themes for conversation, finds it easier to talk about his daughter in most places where he meets the young people, than about any other subject: and if Miss Alcott herself would go on [these?] long excursions westward which her father delights in, she would be fêted and lionized from one ocean to the other. To this she is much averse, however. She is spending the autumn and winter in Boston, with her orphan niece, the daughter of her sister, Mme Meriker [Nieriker], the child having made the journey and voyage from Switzerland to America very prosperously, a month or two ago.

Little folks would lose a great pleasure if delightful Miss Alcott should fail to open her scrap-bag and bring out a new story when the year comes round. They are not destined to disappointment, for this time she has drawn from her store-house the fresh and amusing history of Jack and Jill; not the famed heroes of the nursery rhyme, but two children whose home was in the classic village of Concord, where the author was born and still lives, and where many poets and philosophers have made the place famous. Jack and Jill meet with a sad misfortune at the commencement of the narrative. Jack breaks his leg, and Jill injures her spine and is helpless for a long time. The unfortunate result of the coasting frolic forms the central point of the story. A bevy of bright boys and girls overflowing with fun and good nature, and full of sympathy for the sufferers, mingle in the scenes, and help out the unwinding of the plot. It is a thoroughly enjoyable story, preaches patience, resolution and cheerfulness without a word of sermonizing, is bright and winsome with its atmosphere of fun and merry-making, and will prove to all who read it that Miss Alcott’s fancy does not grow dim; that her inventive faculty does not fail, and that her willing hand does not weary in wielding the pen for the pleasure and amusement of the little men and women she dearly loves. Many readers have already enjoyed the tale as a serial in the St. Nicholas, and many more will enjoy it as a much-desired Christmas book in its present attractive form.

To our mind this is the best story the author of “Little Women” has written, and millions can testify that the previous stories have been good ones.

It is hardly necessary to say much about Miss Alcott’s new story. Her name is a guarantee that we shall find in it
nice healthy-minded boys and girls whose virtue is often far above their grammar. As might be expected from the title, Jack and Jill are two little friends who get a terrible fall while “coasting,” but undergo an immense amount of petting all the time they are getting well. English readers lay down these and similar books with the feeling that American days must be at least ten times as long as ours, and American mothers at least twenty times as long-suffering. They also have curious sensations as to the free-and-easy terms on which everybody lives; but here we tread on grave social problems, and must stop.


Mrs. Alcott has for some time been favourably known on this side the Atlantic, and her *Jack and Jill* will be welcome to the numerous readers of her *Little Women* and other books. Village life is depicted in a very entertaining manner – not without humour – through a series of sketches which, while apparently disjointed, have yet a connecting link. “You can make things go as you want them,” says one of the characters, “... [remainder of sentence omitted].” This is at least good healthy doctrine to preach to boys who have to make their way in the world.


*Jack and Jill*, a village story, by Louisa M. Alcott (Roberts Brothers), is a fairly good book for juvenile readers, but not so eminently good as we expect from the author of “Little Women” and “An Old-fashioned Girl.” Indeed, it awakens the apprehension that Miss Alcott is in danger of settling down into the lower estate of the ordinary story-writer.

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Miss Alcott’s stories need no commendation to English readers. This is a pleasant and wholesome picture of child-life in an American village, and interesting as indicating the precocity of American children. The children get thrown from a snow sledge, and both are seriously injured – Jack broke his leg, and Gill injured her spine, and they are kept together for some months. The development of character constitutes the interest. We hope, however, English children will not be captivated by their American English.


Miss Alcott’s book, *Jack and Gill*, is a tale of New England village life, in which, with her usual skill, she interests her young readers in the sayings and doings, pranks
and diversions, schemes and enjoyments, of a number of young folk, the companions of Jack and Gill, and pictures the unfolding of their dispositions and characters under the influences by which they are surrounded.

*Scribner’s Monthly* 21.3 (January 1881): 481.

Miss L. M. Alcott has chosen a taking title for her latest story for young people, published in *St. Nicholas* during the year just closed. “Jack and Jill” are so dear to the boys and girls, as early companions of their childhood, that the young readers of this charming little tale of real life will feel that from henceforth they have a real possession in the adventures of the two classic characters of their nursery romance. The Jack and Jill of Miss Alcott’s story are a boy and girl living in the delightful village of Harmony, which we must take for granted as being a real place, slightly idealized, somewhere in the heart of New England. Jack is the child of “well-to-do” parents, and the fortunes of Jill are less generous. Lass and lad come to grief early in the tale, all through sliding down hill. Both are disabled, and Jill is taken to the home of the family of Jack. The trials of the twain, their patience, and the various devices invented for their entertainment, form the staple of the narrative which follows. The author treads on the dangerous verge of a false sentimentality when she ventures on the somewhat unusual expedient of choosing two ill people as the central figures around whom revolve all the incidents and interests of the story. Little people very readily learn that to be ill is to be “interesting,” and there are instances on record of youthful deceivers “making believe sick” in order to gain a sympathy which they did not deserve. But there is no mawkish sentimentality about Jack and Jill. They are sensible children, taking their privations in courageous fashion, and getting heartily well, so that the curtain falls on an entirely healthful group of young folks.


Miss Alcott’s *Jack and Jill* has the merits of her writing more conspicuously than the faults. There is the generous confidence in children which she always shows, the rosy light in which she looks upon the hobbledehoy period, and the persistent lesson of kindness, charity, and amiable sacrifice. The scenes are lively, the incidents varied, and a cheerfulness predominates which is justified by the unfailing success of every character in the book. Yet there is nothing like real character drawing, and the air of life in the book is secured not by an endowment of the persons represented, but by the animation and cheeriness of the author. Nor can we altogether find satisfaction in the suppressed love-making of these young people. The author protests that she is only drawing the picture of a natural society of boys and girls who are soon to be young men and young women, but there is a self-consciousness about the book on this side which impairs its simplicity. We are, no doubt, unreasonable readers; we object to the blood-and-thunder literature, and when in place of it we have the milk-and-sugar we object again. What do we want?
Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices


_St. Nicholas_ 8.4 (February 1881): 333.

A—, Flo. Letter. _St. Nicholas_ 10.6 (April 1883): 476.


AN OLD-FASHIONED THANKSGIVING, VOL. 6 OF AUNT JO’S SCRAP-BAG (1882)
Miss Alcott has just added the sixth volume to her Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag series, and the publishers announce that the bag is now full. It is called “An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving,” and contains eleven stories, the leading one of which gives the name of the books. The titles of the others are “How it all Happened,” “The Doll’s Journey from Minnesota to Maine,” “Morning Glories,” “Shadow Children,” “Poppy’s Pranks,” “What the Swallows Did,” “Little Gulliver,” “The Whale’s Story,” “A Strange Island,” and “Fancy’s Friend.” No more delightful stories in the language can be found than are contained in the six volumes of this set, and we commend them to parents who wish to put into the hands of their children pure, interesting and wholesome literature, adapted to their tastes and understanding.

The tale from which this volume takes its name is capital, well charged with New England flavor, humor, drollery, and good sense. Miss Alcott has a highly imaginative way of telling a story, which transforms it into a procession of pictures. She is herself the very spirit of the tale she relates and rides on supreme over all the fun and all the movement of her fancy with as much delight in it as any of the actors or spectators.

Aunt Jo’s Scrap-bag has a more miscellaneous title [than Proverb Stories], but no more miscellaneous table of contents. It leads off with a Thanksgiving story; and the eleven tales of which the book is composed are of a simpler order than those of Proverb Stories. The Scrap-bag series is completed by the issue of this sixth volume.
An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving by Louisa M. Alcott is the last volume in Aunt Jo's Scrap Bag series, and like its predecessors is brim full of good, healthful stories which will be especially welcome to the juveniles, and may also prove interesting to their elders.

Will little people ever weary of this genial writer? Not so long as the fertile brain that fashioned “Little Women” manifests its power in such charming manner as in this volume before us. The stories are all simply told, and in a fashion to retain the interest of youngest readers; while those of more mature years need not feel ashamed to own themselves fond of what the “Scrap-Bag” affords.

“Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag,” that is to say, Miss Alcott’s, is now full, and a most wonderful bag it is. The sixth and concluding volume of these stories, written for children but capable of entertaining older people as well, is entitled An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving, from the name of the first story. The Dolls’ Journey, and Shadow Children, which follow, are especially interesting, and, like all the others, contain moral lessons.

“Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag” is full. The new book containing “An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving, &c.,” completes its contents. The strings may now be tightly drawn, and the happy possessor of the six volumes of stories it contains can enjoy the contents at leisure. The new volume is as full of fun, merriment and having a good time generally as the five books that have preceded it. Young folks have only to loosen the strings of “Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag,” to find an unfailing source of amusement, for the stories are good enough to read over and over again, and then to be commenced afresh. Youthful readers have no more sympathetic friend than Miss Alcott. She knows how to touch their hearts, appeal to their inborn love of fun, and inspire them with a desire to act well their part in the duties as well as the pleasures of life.
The thousands of girls who have come to regard “Aunt Jo’s” inexhaustible “Scrap-Bag” as another Fortunatus’s purse – a treasury that is never empty, but only awaits the willing hand in order to yield up its riches to its fortunate possessor – will be rejoiced to learn that Miss Alcott has drawn from its capacious recesses a new budget of stories, brimming with innocent gayety and sparkling incident, and rich in bright pictures of wholesome boy and girl life in thrifty New England homes.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices


[See review under Proverb Stories (pp. 57–58).]


The thousands of girls who have come to regard “Aunt Jo’s” inexhaustible “Scrap-

SPINNING-WHEEL STORIES (1884)
Helen and Minnie.
Excerpt from Letter.
*St. Nicholas* 11.11
(September 1884): 901.

We are two girls who think the *St. Nicholas* the best magazine to be found, and enjoy every story in it, but Miss Alcott’s most of all. We think her “Spinning-wheel Story” for this month the best one yet; for we both are very fond of boarding-school stories, and this is made more interesting to us by the fact that Miss Orne in the story greatly resembles, both in looks and character, a very dear teacher of our own, which makes it seem more real; and also, because we go to boarding-school ourselves, but board at home, which is not nearly so nice.

*Boston Commonwealth*

Drop a Miss Alcott story-book in one’s house now-a-days, and it is a question which portion of the family will secure its possession first. Her new *Spinning-Wheel Stories* opens with a tale by a grandmother about her spinning-wheel, and this gives the title to the book. This is followed by a series of interesting narratives on a variety of subjects, covering the ground from the Revolution to the present time – the last of all, however, of a more modern wheel, the bicycle. The chapters have pretty head-and-tail pieces. The binding – an appropriate design – is a gilt spinning-wheel with a half-spun hank of flax. The whole presentation is exceedingly clever, and makes Miss Louise more of a favorite than ever.

“A dozen tales in Louisa M. Alcott’s well-known style are gathered under the title, “Spinning-Wheel Stories,” into a pretty red volume. The variety of themes is only limited by the number of the stories, and that they are all bright and entertaining goes without saying, while the connecting thread of narrative answers its purpose very well.

*Boston Evening Transcript*
59.18,232 (22 November 1884): 6:5.

If any writer of stories – girls’ stories – holds a secure place in the young heart, it is Miss Alcott. There is a double charm
to everything she writes – that of the story itself and the way in which it is told. This new volume contains, among other tales, “Tabby’s Table Cloth,” “Daisy’s Jewel Box,” “Carry’s [Corny’s] Catamount,” “The Cooking Club” and “The Little House in the Garden.” There are half a dozen others, however, just as charming and interesting, and happy will be the soul of the young girl reader who can settle down in quiet to their enjoyment.

**The Nation 39.1014**
(4 December 1884): 487.

They are as full of variety, spirit, and good feeling as we always expect anything from this author’s pen to be. The story of “Onowandah” is a beautiful Indian tale, that of “Tabby’s Tablecloth” a very live one of Revolutionary times, while “The Hare and the Tortoise” is a capital rendering of the old idea adapted to these days of bicycles.

**The Christian Register**
63.50 (11 December 1884): 793:2.

It is the grandma and auntie of the family who play Scheherezade to this little company of boys and girls. There are twelve stories in all, offering a pleasing variety of topics. Revolutionary adventure and peasant life represent the opposite poles; and there is always, as Aunt Elinor says, “A moral tucked in.” The stories only end because the holidays are over, and the children must go home, for which the readers will be as sorry as those who heard the tales at first hand.

**Zion’s Herald 61.50**

Roberts Brothers publish a delightful little volume for the youngest of our readers, entitled, *Spinning-wheel Stories*. There are a dozen short stories, to which little ears will listen with absorbing fascination.

**The Literary World 15.25**
(13 December 1884): 444.

Already the young readers of *St. Nicholas* have had a pleasant time over Miss Alcott’s dozen of new stories before their coming into a book by themselves. The old Boccaccio and Canterbury Tale style is a
good one, and always works well, forever fresh, though a fashion of centuries gone by. This time it is a party of young people snowed up at the old homestead, a house with a garret full of antique things, and with a grandmother first leading off with a spirited story about wolves and a soldier youth of the War of 1812, and then turning over her “faded old portfolio” of tales for the favorite aunt to read. Of course the storm increased, and the manuscripts held out; and it was all the same to the absorbed listeners if they did not prove to be “old tales” as grandmother promised. The listeners never noticed the anachronism of the venerable lady, who was a maiden marriageable in that far-away war-time, and yet had for some of her subjects the young girls with their “jerseys” and the bicycle experience; but it is just as well – all is fair from such a good story-teller; and who would find fault with Miss Alcott; or hardly presume even, for example, to ask if the lesson is quite clear in “Daisy’s Jewel-box: how she filled it.”

The Academy 26.n.s.659 (20 December 1884): 409.

Nothing that comes from the pen of Miss Alcott – whom we will venture to call the Maria Edgeworth of America – can ever be unwelcome. But we must be allowed to say that the present collection of tales is miscellaneous, and therefore unequal. To our taste by far the best are the five opening ones, which have some connexion with the eponymous spinning-wheel. It is not difficult to identify the “Eli” of number three with “Amos,” the author’s own father. From New England in early times we are suddenly taken to revolutionary France, and then brought back to a girls’ school of to-day, where too much gymnastics induces somnambulism. “The Little House in the Garden” is, again, first-rate of its kind. In the next story (a somewhat commonplace one) we are treated to a curious example of phonetic spelling – “Mr. Vaughn” (why not “Vawn”?) – which is maintained consistently. The thick paper on which the book is printed has proved too strong for the binding.

The Book Buyer 1.12 (January 1885): 375.

These tales have for some time past supplied a monthly treat to the young readers of St. Nicholas. They are now offered upon the altar of holiday literature. Bright, strong, and wholesome as ever is Miss Alcott’s style, and the stories have the merit of variety in range and subject. A party of young people, snow-bound in an old New England farm-house during a Christmas holiday, appeal to grandmamma for entertainment, and are gratified by a series of tales “of all sorts, picked up in my travels at home and abroad.” “Tabby’s Table-Cloth” is the adventure of a little Revolutionary maiden of Concord, in 1775; “Onawandah” is an Indian story of the valley of the Connecticut; “Little Things” tells how little, old-time Abigail Lyon darned her father’s silk stockings, and won everybody’s heart by her sweet self-sacrifice; “The Banners of Beaumanoir” is a lovely story of “La Vendel;” “Carny’s [Corny’s] Catamount” stirs the boyish heart with longing to go and share the young hero’s
adventurous exploits upon the mountain side, while “Jerseys” and “Daisy’s Jewel-Box” are just such stories as every mother of young girls wants to see put into their hands for hours of recreation.

The Atlantic Monthly
55.328 (February 1885): 285.

Spinning-Wheel Stories, by Louisa M. Alcott (Roberts): a collection of stories, many of them of historic days, set in a decorative border of contemporaneous talk. Miss Alcott’s rosy hue of life is not the worst medium for children to see through.


One question that I would like to ask is, how, in Miss Alcott’s “Spinning-wheel” story about the lunch-party, eight girls could partake of one mince pie so freely as to cause any of them to have bad dreams. For my part, it does not trouble me to eat a quarter or even a half a pie, and our pies are not all crust and no fruit, either.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

C., Elizabeth. Letter. St. Nicholas 12.8 (June 1885): 635.
W., Mamie S. Letter. St. Nicholas 13.8 (November 1886): 635.
A CHRISTMAS DREAM, VOL. 1 OF LULU'S LIBRARY (1886)
Lulu’s Library is “Aunt Jo’s” (Louisa M. Alcott) Christmas gift to the boys and girls. It is a series of twelve short stories told in the author’s delightful way, and the boys and girls will thank their old friend, Aunt Jo, very much, for so timely and pleasant a gift.


“Lulu’s Library,” by Louisa M. Alcott is a pretty little book for girls, made up of short stories, which appear to be exceedingly well told.

The Christian Register 64.52 (24 December 1885): 826:2.

In a brief preface, Miss Alcott says, “Having nothing else to offer this year, I have collected these stories (which have been favorite “bed-time” stories for her little niece) in one volume as a Christmas gift to my boys and girls.” The names of the stories are “A Christmas Dream,” “The Candy Country,” “Naughty Jocko,” “The Skipping Shoes,” “Cockytoo [Cockyloo],” “Rosy’s Journey,” “The Fairy Box,” “A Hole in the Wall,” “The Piggy Girl,” “The Three Frogs,” and “Baa, Baa!” Scores of little children will share the pleasure of the “little niece” in reading and hearing these stories. If too late for Christmas, their mammas can remember that New Year’s is a good time to make presents.


It is unnecessary to commend a new volume of stories by Miss Alcott, whose name must be as well known to the “little women” of England as to those of New England. Spinning-Wheel Stories of last year had the special attraction of historical reminiscences. In Lulu’s Library fairy tales are mingled with stories of everyday life; and all alike are told with the charm and the confidence of a veteran writer for the young. The woodcuts are unambitious, but sufficient.

The Critic n.s. 4.104 (26 December 1885): 306.

This year Louisa M. Alcott begins a new series of children’s books, under the title of ‘Lulu’s Library’ (Roberts Brothers). It contains a dozen of her best short stories, only
three of which have hitherto been published. They are bright, full of fun, and with a great deal of child wisdom. The boys and girls who have read Miss Alcott’s books from year to year will hail this volume with as much delight as they have any of its predecessors, for it has all the qualities which have made her books so entertaining.


No one has entered more heartily into the spirit of the Christmas season, and told stories in better keeping with the time than has Miss Alcott in Lulu’s Library. The book is a treasure house from which the older people will enjoy drawing out the good things for the children almost as much as the children themselves.

Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine 112.669 (March 1886): 325.

Miss Alcott’s fame as a writer of juvenile stories has been so well established that any new work of hers will stand independently of any notice from the critics. “Lulu’s Library” includes twelve short stories of a very pretty kind, suitable to read or tell at bedtime. The book will make a nice birthday gift.


Miss Louisa Alcott has made her specialty of those years in a girl’s life that come between the time of the doll and the time of the lover. She has written of all the phases of youth—of bridals and of schools and of “little men” and of young mothers. But her own subject is the girl proper. In Lulu’s Library, however, she writes of little children for little children, and does it charmingly. Best, perhaps, of the stories is that which tells of Lily’s journey into Candy Country, Cake Land, and Bread Land. Excursionists of this kind have followed now for some twenty years the footsteps of Alice into Wonderland; but Miss Alcott shows a fresh inventiveness, and takes her little readers so realistically through the sticky and indigestible countries of sweets and cakes that they will enjoy the plain loaf at the end in perfect sympathy with the heroine. Names of good things are generally international enough, we find, for English readers, though some of the candies and “cookies” may need translation, and there is more maize meal in the wholesome country than our little ones are accustomed to. The book is very prettily illustrated.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

JO’S BOYS, AND HOW THEY TURNED OUT: A SEQUEL TO “LITTLE MEN” (1886)
Ever since it was announced—half a dozen years ago—that Miss Alcott was at work on a sequel to “Little Men,” the girls and boys of the country have been impatiently waiting for its appearance. Season after season they have eagerly examined the list of the publisher in the hope that the promised day had come, and season after season they have thrown it down disappointed, though not discouraged. Some of the readers of “Little Men” have grown to be big men, but we doubt if one of them, or any of those who have had a taste of Miss Alcott’s books, have lost the desire to follow them out to the end. The book is here at last; handsomely bound, beautifully printed, and thick enough to warrant a long day’s enjoyment for leisurely readers. Ten years are supposed to have passed since “good-by” was said to the boys at Plumfield. In the opening chapter of the new book half of the original twelve come back to the old home for a visit at the same time. Where the modest school stood, a college—not a very large one, but yet a college—has sprung up, with Mr. Bhaer as president and Mr. March chaplain. Franz comes from Hamburg, where he is a merchant; Emil from his ship, which happens in port; Nat from the conservatory and Dan from the mining regions of California. Tom and Jack are near by, and the girls, Daisy and Josie, Bess and Nan, are all at home and flourishing. They have no end of delightful times during the stay of the visitors at Plumfield, and the interest of the story does not end with their going. The book ends with two weddings, and with this sentence, which will cause a pang in the heart of every reader, “And now let the music stop, the lights die out, and the curtain fall forever on the March family.” Miss Alcott’s books are all delightful, and “Jo’s Boys” is one of the best of them. A fine portrait in profile, engraved from the bust by Walton Ricketson, serves as a frontispiece.

It is positively the last appearance. This new story from Miss Alcott’s pen, which the little men and women, and the big men and women, too, for that matter, have been anxiously waiting and looking for for so long a time, is at last finished; and now one can hear from thousands of homes the happy cry of children expectant for its coming. A little maid of seven years was overheard saying last night: “What, a new story of Louisa M. Alcott’s! Oh, I do so want to see it!” and a much older person, nearer seventy in fact than seven, said on learning that Jo’s boys were at last to be introduced to us again: “We shall all read it. We love her and her books better than anything else in the world.” Every book-store in Boston has been receiving letter after letter for many months asking that Louisa M. Alcott’s new story “be sent immediately;” and, as these few facts intimate, another book by Miss Alcott is a very noticeable literary event. We have, now, in “Jo’s Boys” what will no doubt be her last attempt at revealing the pleasant familiar secrets and fortunes of the March family, and if this be true, this is also probably
her last attempt at anything of universal, absorbing interest. For, however delightful “Eight Cousins” and “Rose in Bloom” and all the rest are – and in children’s literature they are almost unexcelled for refinement and grace and charm – nothing that Miss Alcott has written and nothing she ever could write would take the place in the hearts of her admirers of stories such of [as] her “Little Women” and her “Little Men,” which deal with Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy and Jo’s boys. One comes to this last book, therefore, with a kind of fear and trembling. One dreads to turn its pages lest he may find the old nameless charm now lacking; just as one lingers long before returning to a home that is filled with pleasant associations, from very fear that the old scenes will be not quite the same, the flower-scented breezes not quite so sweet, the summer afternoons at the old place not quite so long and dreamy; the voices of the birds not quite so full of the old bubbling life and cheerful, tireless exuberance of song:

Be Yarrow stream unseen, unknown!
[7 lines omitted.]

And, yes, it is another Yarrow, this later book. But it is yet the same. At any rate, whether we like it or not, Miss Alcott will not give us more. She warns us by an irrevocable decree. “Let the music stop,” she says, “the lights die out, and the curtain fall forever on the March family.”

Every one familiar with Miss Alcott’s work – that is, all intelligent persons – knows that to attempt anything like finding one single thread of plot running through her stories would be a quite useless task. In this respect she resembles Thackeray. The short-story writer of the present day, with his craze for absolute crystallization of effect and the subordination of every detail to the artistic perfection of the whole, finds very little of interest in “Vanity Fair” or “Pendennis.” Thackeray to such is old-fashioned in his method. And such Miss Alcott, no doubt, appears to many. But, after all, both, in their own peculiar, individual ways, are true to life, and in so far great. Life has very few visibly artistic plots. We need a vantage ground from somewhere behind the grave in order to see any very definite unity in most individual living. When the last thing is said, it is all one long pathetic expression of faith and trust, in which, whether virtue or vice seem in the end triumphant, we must stand steadfastly ever with hope. Thus, plots are for society novels and for the stage, and for the trivial petty clevernesses of brilliant short stories. Why should one attempt, then, to detail the plot of a story that has none, or better, has a hundred? Like Johnson’s young lady, and, as Miss Alcott suggests, like girls’ arguments, truthful stories, as far as their plots are concerned, just as life is, are “not categorical, but all wiggle-waggle.”

To set aside, then, this story, as far as it is story, there are besides many interesting things to say about it, many matters which, had one time and space, he might talk about at length. Miss Alcott has taken advantage of the opportunity of publishing a new book to recount, covertly, some of her own trials as an author. The chapter which she devotes to herself is very interesting. She is talking about herself as Jo, and she says: “A book for girls being wanted by a certain publisher, she hastily scribbled a little story, . . . [remainder of sentence and additional sentence omitted].” Her first book, labored over for years, and launched full of the high hopes and ambitious dreams of youth, foundered on its voyage, though the wreck continued to float along afterwards, to the profit of the publisher at least.” The story referred to is “Moods,” published in 1865; and it was two years later that the great success of “Little Women” made her so widely famous. But with fame came discomfort. She
was grievously afflicted with letters, callers and thousands of requests for autographs and photographs. Here is an example of the letters by which absent lion-hunters make their roar well known:

Madam: As it has pleased heaven to bless your efforts with a large fortune, I feel no hesitation in asking you to supply funds to purchase a new communion-service for our church. [1 sentence omitted.]

Letters would come from mothers asking how to bring up a family of daughters; from young men wishing to know what sort of girls they should marry, and if she knew any like those in her books; from people wishing her to adopt their children; poems from multitudes, of which an example may be given in the following stanza:

Consider the lilies, how they grow;
They toil not, yet are fair,
Gems and flowers and Solomon’s seal,
The geranium of the world is J. M. Bhaer;
from magazines for her to edit them gratis; from a young girl inconsolable because her favorite hero died, and “would dear Mrs. Bhaer rewrite the tale and make it end good?”; from a minister wishing to know her religion; and so on and on. No wonder that the poor woman was tired out, and made almost sick for a time. When before did a summer breeze ever raise so great a storm?

But although this gossip is so interesting, so charming, and although we do love the writer very much indeed, and would be glad to have her talk on to us forever about herself, does it not seem, after all, that this new story was not exactly the place to utter these autobiographical confidences? Is not this chapter that contains them a bit of an interpolation; nay, not merely “a bit,” like those pleasant little, sometimes irrelevant, asides of Thackeray’s, but a good deal too much of personal gossip, to insert in one’s manuscript, when one is writing a new story? It would have been so much better if it had all been published “by request” in the Atlantic for instance. Then the fortunes of Jo’s boys, the melodramatic events of Dan’s and Emil’s careers, the well-drawn characterizations of the Harvard “men,” “Stuffy” and “Dolly,” and all the other occurrences of that happy summer “of roses and wine,” (fear not, it is but figurative wine) might have all been told without any interruption such as we now meet with. One really cannot help wishing that this chapter, “Jo’s Last Scheme,” had been, on afterthought, omitted.

Yet this is not kind. In praise of [“]Jo’s Boys” nothing more need be said than that it was written by Louisa May Alcott. This tells the whole story. There is the same womanly, motherly, sisterly – one cannot find the word he wants – well, there is Miss Alcott’s sympathy, in the book; her woman’s instinct which sounds to the depths of a boy’s or girl’s heart; the same fresh atmosphere of true refinement; the same love for true and beautiful things. These books of hers, including the last, will long remain unrivalled as American classics. They reveal, as no other work ever written in this country, the hopes and longings and aspirations, the fears and troubles and the doubts; in a word, the sunshine and the shadows of our best and happiest homes.

Flow on forever, Yarrow stream!
[7 lines omitted.]


The long expected new book of Miss Louisa M. Alcott, which has been awaited
for half a dozen years, was at length published yesterday, with an edition of thirty thousand, which, it may be added, was practically exhausted before it was published. It is called “Jo’s Boys,” and deals with the delightful group of people about the “Little Women” who had grown into elderly life. There is all the old freshness and sparkle in the story and more strength and fire than in any other volume by Miss Alcott that we recall. The story of Emil and that of Dan are told with a dramatic force which is most effective; while the autobiographical strain of such chapters as “Jo’s Last Scrape” will make the book attractive to all who are interested in the author or in American letters. A portrait of Miss Alcott from the bas relief of Walton Ricketson, serves as frontispiece to this delightful record of how Jo’s “Little Men” turned out, and will be welcome to the innumerable friends of this most popular of American Authors.


The instructions of maiden ladies as to the proper bringing up of children are apt to rouse a good-humored contempt in the minds of parents. Not without reason, for the patience born of parental love does not always enter into the maxims of the maiden ladies. Miss Alcott is, however, an exception among the sisterhood. The teachings which she here presents in the form of a story are generally sound, wholesome and judicious. The woman’s hand shows, of course, in the priggishness and sentimentality of some of the “Boys,” but that may be forgiven for the sake of lively and tender-hearted “Mrs. Jo.”

With this volume are finally dismissed the amusing child-characters of “Little Men.” Their fortunes as marriageable young men and maidens are here discussed and the conventional conclusions described or indicated. “Mrs. Jo,” as the universal confidante, is the most successful character; her warm heart, quick temper and ready sympathy make the sunshine of the book.

Miss Alcott has never made pretensions to literary style, and this story is as haphazard and “jerky” in this particular as were her former ones. But style or no style, there is no doubt that the author’s popularity will be largely increased by this pleasant and innocent tale. It is probably the true consequences of that popularity which she thus describes in “Jo’s Boys”:

“I have made up my mind on one point” said Mrs. Jo with great firmness.
“I will not answer this kind of letter.”

[Remainder of 25 quoted paragraphs omitted.]


The publishing event of the week has been the issue of “Joe’s Boys,” Miss Alcott’s sequel to “Little Women,” by Roberts Brothers. A generation has passed from the stage
since the first book was written, and its
author has become a mature woman. It is
understood that she has been some time
employed upon the successor to it. Thou-
sands of readers will approach this later
book with keen curiosity. They will find
it lacking in some of the spontaneity of
its predecessors, yet still an interesting vol-
ume, in which Miss Alcott furnishes a pic-
ture of some of her later experiences, and
to which she imparts the charm of a man-
ner that she has retained in all her writ-
ings. She is the most popular writer in our
state, if not in the country, to-day, and an
enormous edition of her book has been
printed.

The Critic n.s. 9.147

The long-looked-for and much-desired se-
quel to Miss Alcott’s ‘Little Men’ appears
at last, under the title of ‘Jo’s Boys, and
How They Turned Out.’ (Roberts.) Miss
Alcott writes with more seriousness than
in days of yore; but if there is less of rol-
licking fun in ‘Jo’s Boys’ than in ‘Little
Women,’ there is much quiet, pleasant hu-
mor; while the earnest, helpful tone of the
book justifies the warm welcome it is sure
to receive. Of grown-up boys there would
naturally be many love-affairs to tell; but
it seems almost a pity that it should be so
in this case, as the tone of the book is still
that of one about boys, and its romance
has a singular strain of youthfulness about
it, which hardly enables one to feel in it
the dignity of real love, courtship and mar-
riage. One of the most amusing chapters is
that in which Miss Alcott graphically de-
scribes the sufferings of a favorite author
subjected to the devotion of foolish wor-
shippers.

The New-York Times
36.10,967 (26 October

It has been some years since the best of our
story writers for children has written any-
thing, and the many early admirers of Miss
Alcott, the fathers and mothers of to-day,
will be delighted to meet once more their
former acquaintances, those bright boys
and girls who peopled her pages. In “Jo’s
Boys” the lads have grown older, as have
the girls. But they are all as pleasing as of
yore. Miss Alcott, whose books have made
her famous, tells humorously how such
kudos brings with its [it] penalties. Any-
body who has read “Little Men” seems to
think he has a perfect right to call on Miss
Alcott, to tramp over her grounds, and
to insist on having her autograph. Bevies
of schoolgirls on their vacation demand
recognition. This is a charming bit, which
we do not think is imaginative on Miss Al-
cott’s part, for it sounds true. The servant
saves: “A queer kind of lady wants to know
if she can catch a grasshopper in the gar-
den.” “. . . [4 sentences omitted.]” The au-
thoress, Mrs. Bhaer, gives her consent, and
presently her maid returns. “She’s much
obliged, ma’am, and she’d like an old
gown or a pair of stockings of yours to put
in a rug she’s making. Got a vest of Emer-
son’s she says, and a pair of Mr. Holmes’s
trousers and a dress of Mrs. Stowe’s.” “Jo’s
Boys” gives the last, the very, very last
appearance of all the characters. When
they have grown to be men and women
Nan remains a spinster, Stuffy becomes an
Alderman, Dolly a tailor, Rob a Professor,
and Teddy a clergyman, and so the curtain falls on the Marsh [March] family.

Zion’s Herald 63.43

The one juvenile book of the hour that enjoys an astonishing popularity on account of its predecessors from the same pen, of which 30,000 copies are said to have been printed for the first edition, is *Jo’s Boys, and How They Turned Out; A Sequel to Little Men*, by Louisa M. Alcott. Boston: Roberts Brothers. $1.50. The singular quality of these books of Miss Alcott is, that while they are fascinating for quite young children, they are just about as attractive to the older ones and to their parents also. This is a delightful, natural, instructive, and very entertaining volume. It carries the best of counsels disguised in its pleasant recitals. It will be read over and over again in thousands of families. Many little eyes will be fastened upon the good face forming the frontispiece.


The long-expected “Sequel to Little Men” has at last made its appearance, and readers by the hundred thousand will follow with absorbed interest the adventures of the rollicking, restless children when they were “older grown” and took up the battle of life in earnest. Miss Alcott’s inspiration has not failed, neither has her hand lost its cunning. The March family, made illustrious by her skillful pen, is known all over the land. Its members are guests who never weary their hosts, who make no trouble, who come only when they are wanted, and who are honored and loved wherever they are known. They are not real people, but they mingle fact and fiction in harmonious proportions, and enchain the heart and the imagination. Who can ever forget the cry of exultation and delight that was heard all over the country at the advent of “Little Women?” the inimitable story of a group of sisters, full of talent, energy, and determined to find a field for development, in a way so realistic, so intensely human, so like to ordinary girls, that a sympathetic chord was touched in every reader’s breast, and the paean of satisfaction swelled into a triumph for the happy author, whose praise was on every tongue! “Little Men” was loudly demanded from many thousand readers. It followed in due time, but was not quite up to the standard of “Little Women.” That was not to be expected, for it is a rare thing when an author’s fancy finds expression in more than one work of transcendent excellence. “Little Men” was, however, welcomed with unabated interest, and a strong desire was aroused to learn something more of Jo’s boys and how they turned out. Miss Alcott has written the “Sequel of Jo’s Boys” at long intervals during the past seven years, and with the present issue she announces that the music stops, the lights die out, and the curtain falls forever on the March family. Jo’s boys are introduced to the reader after the passage of ten years from their first appearance as “Little Men.” The beloved mother of the “Little Women” and one of the sisters in the group have passed to the other side. The three sisters are married and settled in Plumfield, and the members of the three families take part in the narrative. The young people are a lively set and the reader’s interest is not allowed to flag for a moment in following their adventures. They are just entering on life in
earnest. They choose professions, travel over the world, make love in the most vigorous manner, and wherever they go come back to rejoice the heart of the mother, and more than mother in some cases, who has tenderly brought them up, and is the confidant of their joys and sorrows, and more especially of their love affairs. Most of them turn out well, but some are not a success. The way they are all led, the battles they fight with besetting sins, the riotous fun in which some of them indulge, are all portrayed in the author’s characteristic style, and will draw out bursts of laughter as well as tears of sympathy from legions of readers. The book is more for young men and maidens than for children, but it will make younger and older readers long to read over again “Little Women” and “Little Men,” and complete the series with “Jo’s Boys and How They Turned Out.” The work would not be Miss Alcott’s handiwork if it did not discuss the progressive topics of the time. Coeducation of the sexes is shown up in the College, woman’s rights pervades the atmosphere, an artist, an actor and a doctor, all of the feminine persuasion, comically mingle in the scenes, and “Mrs. Jo” writes a book, untrammelled by household cares and the distractions of many children. The chapter on the annoyances to which authors are subjected is evidently a portrayal of Miss Alcott’s own experience. The fault of the story is that there is too much of it. One is bewildered by the numerous boys and girls, and finds it hard to keep the run of “who is who.” This will not hinder the new volume from winning a high place in popular favor, nor lessen its moral influence, nor detract from its cheerful philosophy. Every reader will heartily join in the wish that Miss Alcott, having said her say concerning the March family, may long be spared to exercise her great gift of writing books that enter into the hearts and feelings of youthful readers.


“First on ‘Jo’s Boys’!”
“I speak for the first shy at Miss Alcott’s new book!”
“Here, right this way, if you please! Pass me the sequel to ‘Little Men.’”

There was quite an uproar in the school library on that second Saturday in October, when our old friends of the campus, Fred, Bert, Harry and Will, swarmed in, each eager to possess himself of the event of the year in the juvenile book world.

“I’ll lend my copy to one of the fellows that’s left,” volunteered knickerbockered Archie. “I had a birthday on Thursday, you know, and my sister sent it to me for a present. And isn’t it prime too? Shipwrecks and mad dogs – at least they thought he was mad – and it was ever so exciting; and Nan behaved like a regular brick!”

“Why, does she come in again?” cried Bert, excitedly.

“Yes; and so does Tommy Bangs and all the rest,” went on Archie, quite proud of the audience that had gathered about him. “Why, it’s just as if you knew the people, and had been acquainted with ’em right on from ‘Little Women.’ I don’t care if that is a girl’s book, it’s ten times better than those wishy-washy boys’ stories some men write, with heroes that are just like some dolls; you pull one string and they set to and whip a whole crowd of fellows bigger than themselves; then pull another and they know just where to stand to save some millionaire’s daughter from being tossed by a bull, and so make their fortunes.”
The boys all laughed at Archie’s criticism, and Will cried: “Hear, hear; oh, ye shades of Peter Parley?”

“There’s a lot about Dan in the new book,” continued the youngest; “some regular Wild West adventures, too. But there’s one thing I’d like to have Miss Alcott explain, and that’s how two people, a fellow and a girl, can ride on one bicycle. Tommy Bangs tells how he took Dora Somebody-or-other on behind for a ride, one day. He might have managed it on a tricycle, but it says that they – Tom and Dora – were on bicycles at the beginning of the chapter.

“Is Jo as funny as ever?” inquired Harry.

“Well, of course she’s older; but young Jo, Meg’s daughter, rather takes her place. The way that girl dives into the ocean after the actress’s bracelet is just a caution. But you’ll laugh when you come to the place where the old lady wants to be allowed to catch a grasshopper on the lawn, just because Mrs. Bhaer, the famous author, lives there. She said she was making a collection of grasshoppers from the gardens of Longfellow, Emerson and all that crowd of big bugs.”

“I dare say that incident was suggested by Miss Alcott’s own experience with autograph fiends,” remarked Fred. “And, by the way,” he added, “I was just reading in the paper, the other night, how she works. It says she sometimes plans whole chapters lying awake in bed, keeps it in her mind, and when she gets up in the morning just writes it down as if she were copying something.”

“I wish I could reel off my compositions that way,” sighed Archie. “What else did you find out about her, Fred?”

“Why, that she can carry a dozen different plots in her head all at the same time, can finish a book in a month or two, never makes a second draft, and hardly ever corrects.”

“She says in the chapter I was telling you about,” resumed Archie, “that she got twelve requests for autographs in one morning’s mail, for of course Jo herself. And I forgot that this is the very, very last book of the series. You know she’s been half worried to death having girls and boys send her letters – I’m glad now I never did – asking her to write more about Jo, Laurie, Tommy Bangs, and all the rest; so she says at the end of this one that she feels like closing the story with an earthquake that would swallow up Plumfield and everybody connected with it. Anyway, she’s fixed it so she needn’t write another word about the Marches.”

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**The Chautauquan**

7.2 (November 1886): 128.

Louisa M. Alcott has given us in “Jo’s Boys,” the “last appearance of the March family;” all regret that “the curtain falls forever” on this interesting group. In this volume the boys are grown-up and pass through all the “catastrophes” of love-making, but motherly Mrs. Bhaer is still their confident and adviser. The book while not quite so spontaneous as its predecessors, is bright, true, and helpful.

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[Sanborn, Franklin B.].


Miss Alcott has plainly left her mark on the literature of the period, and almost created a special style of fiction for the young,
so that it is with regret that we see her bidding farewell to the work in which she has been engaged so long. Her last book, – "Jo’s Boys and How They Turned Out" – is an adieu to the myriads of readers for whom she wrote “Little Men,” “Little Women” and the many other books which are so well remembered; and it carries on the history faithfully of that circle to which we were introduced long since. She has created a small world of American children and young people, unlike those who are found in the books of Mrs Ewing, Miss Edgeworth, or any of the continental writers, yet as real as any, and with the power to interest us in their history and sentiments. This is much to do, – and Miss Alcott has done it without the grace of a charming style, or the arts of a finished writer, but mainly by the sincerity, and reality of her personages, and the ingenuous morality, without cant, of their life and conversation. It is useless to point out special merits or defects, which none of her actual readers care anything about; they read for the main chance and do not value criticism or compliment. The new book, like its predecessors, and like most of those named in this letter, is published by Roberts, and is finding a large sale, as do all the books of Miss Alcott.

The Graphic 34.884 (6 November 1886): 490:3.

That charming family of “little women” whom Miss Alcott has made dear to so large a circle are once more resuscitated. Now we trace the careers of their descendants and pupils, “Jo’s Boys” (Sampson Low), the children of Meg, Jo, and Amy, and the youths whom Jo and her Professor brought up at Plumfield, to leave them triumphant in their profession, or safe in the harbour of matrimony. Sequels are rarely successful, and this fourth volume of the series, it must be confessed, is a trifle laboured and tedious – a rare fault, indeed, in Miss Alcott. Yet for old associations’ sake, “Jo’s Boys” will not lack readers.

The Academy 30.n.s.759 (20 November 1886): 343.

This is the last and not the best of a series which began with the very popular tale entitled Little Women, and is itself the sequel to Little Men. This is enough to secure it many readers, who will certainly derive much entertainment from the further adventures of Dan and Tommy Bangs, and will be glad to meet Mrs. Jo once more. Bess, we are sorry to find, has not turned out so well in later life as we had anticipated, but such disappointments are not confined to story-books.


The appearance of a new book by Miss Alcott has long been recognized as an event in the literary world, where she, by virtue of no known laws, holds the unassailable state of a fixed star. Jo’s Boys, and How They Turned Out, her latest contribution, is closely related to its predecessor, and the career of our old troops of juvenile favorites is followed with an interest born of affection. The boys turned out well,
as might long ago have been predicted by those familiar with the kindly, but judicious regime of “Mother Bhaer,” who here, as in former tales, reigns supreme. Ten years have intervened since the “Little Men” vanished from our sight, and time has done its work, though the characters, even with their added decade, are essentially boyish. They have, however, almost to a man, developed a fatal proclivity for falling in love, and the gracefully developed daughters of the family furnish ample scope for its manifestation. Many autobiographical sketches are acceptably introduced of Mrs. Jo’s daily life, beset by the indubitable celebrity hunter; the Professor loses none of his bland geniality; Nan is made interesting as a young physician who persistently snubs her adoring Tom until he wisely solaces himself with a more appreciative sweetheart. Bess becomes an artist, and Josie’s dramatic tastes find satisfaction in a professional career. Don [Dan] passes through sundry lawless and thrilling adventures, but before his tragic death becomes duly chastened in spirit. Nat wins fame as a musician, and lays his laurels at Daisy’s feet, and so on through the long list of old favorites, from whom we take final leave on the last page, with feelings of mingled relief and regret. We trust, however, now that the curtain has been run down on the March family, the annals of another family may be forthcoming, as wholesome and interesting, from the same ever-popular source.

Embellished with a portrait and autograph of the author, Jo’s Boys, and How they Turned Out, by Louisa M. Alcott, will find a welcome wherever Little Women and Little Men have been established in family favor. Miss Alcott never writes down to her child audience, but pays her youthful readers the compliment of supposing them intelligent and wide awake. Her books stimulate children to noble endeavor, and show how generous self-denial insures personal and domestic happiness. The little folk who have waited for Jo’s Boys, through the seven years during which it has been written, will not be disappointed in its piquant pages.

[Miss Alcott's Jo’s Boys (Boston: Roberts Bros.) is the last of the series of young-folk books beginning with Little Women. And the older folk, too, will take leave of them with regret. Lingering over the pleasant pages, we too are moved with regret that no Catholic writer has yet given us a book or series of books for young people that will compare in attractiveness of manner and knowledge of human nature with Miss Alcott’s books. Why should the best of our children's books not be founded on a deeper and truer philosophy than that of Emerson? Why should not the beauty of Catholic life be shown through the most powerful of all mediums—the stories loved of the young? We are young during the greater part of our lives, and we return again to our childhood when we grow old.]
This is a sequel to “Little Men,” to read one of Miss Alcott’s works is to wish for all, and her readers will be anxious to know how her heroes fared in later life. It is as good as “Little Women,” praise could go no further. An attractive holiday book.

It is not easy to account, on strictly critical grounds, for the great popularity of Miss Alcott’s books among young readers, but that popularity is both sure and lasting. They are by no means free from a touch of Philistinism, even though their evolution was under the shadow of Emerson’s home. Certain defects of humor and in the finer points of literary taste, and the like obtusenesses and confusions in discriminative powers, evident in the venerable philosophiser who has so effectively and unconsciously burlesqued Emerson and his school, are evident in the sprightlier and more unpretentious work of the daughter. Nevertheless, the sincerity of her writing is great, and it is full of the spirit of earnestness, courage, and helpfulness. Moreover, she is able to give life and the aspect of reality to her characters; by which we do not mean that they always act as real people would, but that they always seem alive. They are doubtless very real to their author. Indeed, one who frankly and confessedly makes the members of her own family play their part in her mimic drama, lessens the difficulties of effective realism very much. Yielding (apparently somewhat against her own judgment) to the importunities of admirers, Miss Alcott has now written a sort of

older boys quite as interesting and charming as the younger boys were. Altogether, her last volume, like its predecessors, is pre-eminently natural, healthful, and fascinating. It is one of the books for young people which will long remain current at the book-stores.”
sequel to “Little Men,” under the name of Jo’s Boys. It tells the fortunes of the boys of the Plumfield school, and the girls of their “set,” when they come to enter their twenties – when Franz is about to be married, and Emil at sea, and Demi through college, and Daisy in love, and Nan studying medicine, and so on. Mr. Lawrence has endowed Plumfield as a coeducational college – a sort of all-in-the-family college, of which Mr. Bhaer is the president, and his father-in-law chaplain, while the ladies of the family play active, though unofficial, parts in its management; a very cosy and idyllic college, not much like the real coeducational places, yet not so much unlike what such a place would be as long as its numbers were kept small and its management highly paternal – and maternal. There is in the book much vigorous and sensible contention for co-education, and for freedom for women, to which Miss Alcott’s popularity and great audience will give its value.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

C. “Books for the Young.” The Literary World n.s. 7.11 (November 1886): 347.
Another collection of short stories for girls, by Miss Alcott, written, as she states, for her own amusement, “during a period of enforced seclusion,” when “the flowers which were my solace and pleasure suggested titles for the tales and gave an interest to the work,” is issued also by Roberts Bros. The title is “A Garland for Girls.” The stories are seven in number, and are supplied with illustrations by Jessie McDermott.


[See review under Flower Fables (p. 6).]


Miss Alcott’s latest book, A Garland for Girls, will be sure of a wide welcome. It is prepared in the interest of a more advanced class of readers than the juveniles to whom her work has of late been largely addressed. The “May Flowers” for example are a group of Boston girls, not yet “out,” who find wise ways and means for the exercise of benevolence; “An Ivy Spray and Ladies’ Slippers,” gives the experience of a brave-hearted girl who gave dancing lessons to eke out the family support; “Pansies,” embodies a pretty little romance; “Water Lilies,” ditto, and “Poppies and Wheat” tells in a most engaging way the story of the foreign travel of two girls who gathered, by way of results, respectively poppies and wheat, or grain and chaff. “Little Button-Rose” is an amusing but impossible enfant terrible who plays the role of peace-maker in a city neighborhood, and “Mountain Laurel and Maidenhair” teaches the lesson of contentment, each in her native sphere. There is not a little beauty and sunshine in this attractive book, and every girl will work to add it to her valued possessions.

The Providence Sunday Journal 3.21 (4 December 1887): 2:5.

Christmastide would be wanting in one of its sources of pleasure for boys and girls unless a new book from Miss Alcott appeared among the newcomers at the happy festival. She has not forgotten her young friends this year, but has woven “A Garland for Girls” made up of flowers that will not fade for many years. The new book has a history. The seven stories it contains were written for the author’s own amusement, during a period of enforced seclusion. The flowers that cheered her lonely hours suggested titles for the tales, and gave an interest to the work. “If,” says Miss Alcott, “my girls find a little beauty
or sunshine in these common blossoms, their old friend will not have made her Garland in vain.” The stories are delightful, not only for girls, but for boys and older readers as well. They are pathetic and humorous, abounding in sprightly incidents and anecdotes, and pervaded by a wise philosophy that takes a cheerful view of life, and inculcates honesty and integrity. “Little Button-Rose” overflows with tenderness and pathos, and “Water Lilies” gives a graphic picture of life at a seaside watering place, bringing out in bold relief the character portraits of the summer guests, who for a short season are so intimately associated.

“A Garland for Girls.”

*Boston Evening Transcript* 60.18,595 (10 December 1887): 5:3.

Miss Alcott’s “Garland for Girls” (Roberts Bros.) includes a number of short stories all teaching lessons of kindness, helpfulness and good sense. Miss Alcott’s style is always hard and mechanical and her vocabulary is small, but her meaning is all that it should be.


“It is only necessary to mention the fact that Miss Alcott has written a new book for girls, and in every State in the Union “Miss Alcott’s new book” will head girls’ lists of wished-for Christmas presents. “A Garland for Girls” is written in the writer’s own inimitable, breezy, talkative style. All the various types of girl characters find their places in it. She gives us the “Fashionable Girl” and the “Old-Fashioned Girl,” “The Book-Worm” and the “Home Daughter,” appreciating the merits of such variety, and yet with an eye open for the weaknesses peculiar to each. “May Flowers” is one of the best of the stories. It presents us with an entertaining sketch of a girl’s sewing circle, and then shows us how each girl succeeded in her attempt to “lend a hand” during the winter. Helen Campbell’s “Prisoners of Poverty” led the girls to wish to do some good, and the various ways they went to work and the various things they accomplished are very interesting to read about, and should be stimulating to the philanthropic endeavors of all ambitious girls. The names of the stories are “May Flowers,” “An Ivy Spray” and “Ladies’ Slippers,” “Pansies,” “Water Lilies,” “Poppies and Wheat,” “Little Button-Rose,” “Mountain Rose [Laurel] and Maidenhair,” and the writer has been very ingenious in working out her practical conceits. There is no way in which a parent or friend can please and at the same time help a girl more than by giving her Miss Alcott’s “Garland for Girls” as a Christmas present.

*The Academy* 32.n.s.816 (24 December 1887): 421.

Miss Alcott has, we believe, been called the American Maria Edgeworth. For our part, we should be more disposed to compare
her with the late Mrs. Craik; for, though none of her novels have won much success, her short stories are all animated by the same spirit of sympathy with the practical needs of the “little women” of to-day. The present collection is, perhaps, less marked than usual by those reminiscences of the early days of New England which have lent such a charm to Miss Alcott’s former volumes. But it can be heartily recommended for its artistic simplicity and its wholesome teaching. We note that this is described as a “copyright edition.”


For the girls Miss Alcott has wove of common flowers, such as pansies and May flowers, a garland that is redolent of a helpful spirit and good works. It gives in a natural and charming style the experience of seven girls who had awakened to the idea there was something they could personally do to make life brighter for the burdened. An excellent book to give to a thoughtless, selfish girl.


A collection of seven stories, which carry, as all Miss Alcott’s books do, a fervent purpose to make girls the real brownies of the race. A rosette optimism makes the books popular with girls; and on the whole, is n’t optimism a little better than pessimism for girls of fourteen?


In one sense it is the most delicate flattery to give an author a short notice. We are sure we need only mention Miss Alcott’s ‘Garland for Girls’ (Roberts Bros.) to have it clearly understood that we think every girl ought to have it, to learn how one set of little maids were encouraged to personal effort for others by reading Mrs. Campbell’s ‘Prisoners of Poverty.’


A charming trait in the character of Miss Alcott was her generous acceptance of any suggestion that another might make in reference to her work, even if the suggestion or question looked like criticism. She never pretended to be infallible, and this modest recognition of her own possible
mistakes endeared her all the more to those fortunate enough to be within the range of her friendship. Though she might have “queened it” over her friends, she never tried to.

About a year ago we reprinted in the Register a pretty little fairy story from her pen, in which she made some allusion to denizens of the insect world in terms which were not absolutely scientific; for she was not writing a treatise on entomology. A lady who knows a great deal about winged insects, in a friendly way, took the Register to task for copying a statement, even in a child’s story, that was not scientifically correct. It was easy to reply that it was not scientific to make the crows talk, and the asters, clematis, buttercups, and clovers go to the polls to elect the violet, modest creature that she was, the queen! But the spirit of science was not to be appeased in this way; and, finding that we could claim Miss Alcott as a personal friend, it was suggested that we might ask her if she by chance had really fallen in with butterflies that conducted themselves after the fashion of moths. The reply which came was a good specimen of the modest, unaffected side of the distinguished woman’s character. Miss Alcott wrote: –

Your friend is right about the butterflies. The word should have been “caterpillars,” as it is they who “spin up,” or grubs of various sorts. The tale was written in great haste, and so the mistake was made, though I am apt to be careless. As the flowers talked and the trees voted, there would have been no want of unity if the butterflies had done anything on that occasion. But it is well to be accurate in facts, in natural history, especially for young people. Pray set the scientific mind at rest, with my thanks for the correction. I have seen too many big, green worms in the woodbine at my windows make cocoons and come out lovely, pale green butterflies in the spring not to know something of their habits and to be fond of them. . . . [reviewer’s ellipsis] I shall read up “pussypillars,” as my little niece calls them; for my fairies must know what they are about if they are to point morals and adorn tales.

But the scientific mind was not set at rest. The letter contained allusions to a species of insect that was apparently not very common, and great was the longing to study the life and habits of the “big, green worm.” Again a letter found its way to Concord, asking for the gift of a few of the inhabitants of the woodbine, it being then June, when the leaves were at their juiciest. Unwearied by such applications, of which Miss Alcott had hundreds, though probably not often for live worms, with the same sweet, generous spirit she wrote again: –

The woodbine over the old home where the fat, green worms used to wander is no longer mine, and I may never be able to find any more elsewhere. If I do I will send them to your friend. I thought them a very common affair, and used to find the brown chrysalids hanging to blinds and in the grass by the steps in the autumn. The great, green moths, or butterflies, were very lovely with their pale color, soft, brown spots, and wide wings hooked at the lower end. I always loved them because we found one fluttering at the closed window of the room where my sister Beth lay dead one spring morning; and I let the little emblem of the freed soul fly away from its cell, as she had done from her prison of pain.
That touching sentence was written only last June. Little we thought that her own freed soul would so soon wing its flight away from this life where she was held by so many cords of love. But henceforth the butterfly will not only hint to us of immortality in general and of Miss Alcott’s love of it on that account, but of the gentleness of her spirit and the delicacy of her treatment of critic and friend, – a delicacy which in its roughest mood would not have ruffled the feathers on a butterfly’s wing.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

_The Sunday School Times_ 29.51 (17 December 1887): 810.
RECOLLECTIONS, VOL. 3 OF LULU’S LIBRARY (1889)
Another writer whose frequent appearance [in *St. Nicholas*] is promised during the coming year makes a noteworthy contribution to the present issue. This is Miss Louisa M. Alcott, whose short story “The Blind Lark,” will be read with delight by the young, and with moistening eyes by the old, the “blind lark” being a poor sightless girl, whose hard lot illustrates the tender sympathy of the poor for fellow suffering, the sweetness of nature that may be hidden beneath rags, and the helpfulness of Christian charity.

We have named our society the “L. M. A.,” in honor of Miss Louisa M. Alcott; and as many of her stories have appeared in the *St. Nicholas*, we thought perhaps the *St. Nicholas* boys and girls would like to hear about one more of the many ways that have been devised to honor her memory.

We meet every Thursday afternoon to read her books, and glean from them some of the good things that may help us in our after-life[.]
a Christmas stocking, and may its gentle readers not forget to think lovingly of the author of Little Women!

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices


COMIC TRAGEDIES, WRITTEN BY “JO” AND “MEG” AND ACTED BY THE “LITTLE WOMEN” (1893)
Every one remembers in the immortal story of “Little Women” how Jo and Meg wrote plays which were enacted with great spirit before admiring audiences in the old Concord barn, and many have been the little readers who have wished that dear Aunt Jo had seen fit to give them a specimen of these wonderful productions. This has now been accomplished and in the new addition to the Alcott books we have a number of these dramas which require but a glance to convince the reader that they are the most astonishing ever produced. Revenge, jealousy, murder, sorcery, high flown romance, appalling catastrophies [catastrophes] and fairy scenes are here all delightfully mixed together just as they existed in the girlish brains of the Alcott children forty years ago. The plays which of course are wildly impossible are yet most characteristic of these most original and unworldly girls and will be read and treasured equally with everything else in the Alcott library.

These “Comic Tragedies” written by “Jo” and “Meg,” and acted by the “Little Women” come to assured friends and cater to an instinct as old as irrepressible. The plays are seven, written by Louisa Alcott and her sister Anna, and the latter, surviving alone of those merry, inventive “Little Women,” prefaces the plays with an account of the makeshifts and difficulties of that little company in the big garret for which the plays were written. To achieve a stunning wardrobe, to construct, for one play alone, a dungeon, a haunted chamber, a cavern and a lonely forest, would somewhat daunt a home company of these richer, more facile times; but the “Little Women” had every resource save money and “modern conveniences.” The plays are quite wonderful in their droll unconscionousness of violation of all probabilities and every canon of art, and nothing could more vividly demonstrate the utter unsophistication and dramatic fervor of the young playwrights, and utility actors as they may well be called, for the authors were the only actors, though the casts had a half-dozen or so leading characters.

When the Alcott girls were young and dwelt in Concord, and were living through those events that afterward were narrated in “Little Women,” they were all stagestruck in a sort of rural, harmless way, and, either in the garret or the barn, they had frequent dramatic performances. Like those of the ancient Greeks, their plays were written for two actors only, who performed all the characters.
with frequent change of costume, it being necessary, of course, to have an audience, and the younger girls cheerfully accepting that task and leaving the fun of acting to their older sisters, known in the books as “Jo” and “Meg.” Where these children got their crude knowledge of the theatrical stage and their dramatic instincts it is hard to say. The “Foreword,” by Meg in this volume, to which one naturally turns for some light on this interesting point, takes no note of it at all. The second sister of Miss Alcott seems to think it was perfectly natural for children living in a Massachusetts hamlet in the first half of this century to write plays in fun that have all the bloodthirsty spirit and romantic symbolism of the old school of melodrama, and to act the parts in them in those leisure hours when children might be better employed playing games of romp in the open air.

As a sort of companion to the late Miss Alcott’s works, these seven amateur plays are now published. Most of them were written by Louisa Alcott herself, and they are all alike and all like the plays of Mr. Fitzball and Mr. Moncrieffe in little. Blood is shed in almost every scene, the course of true love never does run smooth, and the language is appropriately stilted and bombastic. The subjects of the plays and some of their theatrical devices suggest that the girls must have had access to some bound volumes of real plays, quite apart from Shakespeare, for there is nothing at all Shakespearean in these infantile works.

The most amusing piece is an operatic tragedy called “Bianca,” in which the words were committed to memory while the music was composed and sung as the performance proceeded. This volume, at its best, is a curiosity which may attract the notice of people whose childhood was made brighter by the “Little Women” books.

Molineux, Marie A. 

“Another book by Miss Alcott! It is the same binding. I thought she was dead; you told me so!” is the child’s cry. She ‘yet speaketh’ by the aid of the devoted and beloved sister, the last survivor of that brilliant family.

Private theatricals are dear to the heart of all ‘Little Women,’ but few go to the length of writing their own plays. These Comic Tragedies show the germs of the future author, and it is queer to note that in the part Louise Alcott always did less well than the rest; she felt herself at sixteen, the age of self-conceit, unable, because ‘beneath her pen’ to write; so delegated to the more sentimental elder sister to ‘do the love part.’

Those lessons in composition, in choice of words, expansion of themes, coinage of words, imaginative thought, under the tutelage of the father were the bases of the literary facility of later days, and to the wise education of mother and father the children and their admirers owe a great debt. To Mrs. Alcott justice never has been done. The plays are entertaining to read, and in many a household the children will proceed to put them upon the stage, not restricting the performers to two actors as they were originally cast, and hence will proceed much pleasure. The book is made more interesting to both old and young by the addition of a preface or ‘foreword’ by ‘Meg’ and two fine illustrations, one of the ‘Theatre of 1848’ and the other showing reproductions of daguerreotypes of the two authors and actors when they were young ladies.
It is doubtful if the children can wait until Christmas for this addition to their bookshelves.


The “Comic Tragedies” come as an aftermath from Miss Alcott’s hard-driven pen. They were worth gathering together chiefly as a passport to further intimacy with a mind that has given so much good cheer to other minds, whether young or only still keeping the spirit of youth. There are doubtless readers who will feel a thrill of genuine sentiment at the sight of these stage texts of the windy performances with which Louisa and her less gifted sisters amused themselves in the earlier Concord days, “the happiest of my life.” In themselves they show no promise of the sympathy with homely human nature, its every-day hopes and thoughts which is the constraining charm of her works. Lovelorn Zuleikas, Biancas, and Ianthe run riot on the boards; witches, bandits, black masks, and their ilk make havoc of every shred of congruity or probability. But it was “Jo[”] herself who took the part of ranting villain or disdainful queen, and whose ingenuity made the most of the heterogeneous stage properties graphically described in the “foreword by Meg.” This being the case, a volume without intrinsic merit of its own will be sure to find acceptance among readers of all ages and conditions who will approach it from as many standpoints of interest as there are stages of appreciation of the imaginative faculty and of the value of its productions.


A volume comes into our hands that touches a chord of memory and affection that will never cease to vibrate. It bears the name of Miss Alcott, and is called “Comic Tragedies.” It is a collection of plays that were written and performed by Jo and Meg when they were Little Women up in the old barn-loft of the home in Concord. Comic tragedies indeed they are, gruesome and awful, full of stage-whispers and false feelings; much too bloodthirsty for the young people of to-day, who, like their elders, prefer the complex emotions of life to the simple passions of love, hate, revenge and jealousy. Exceedingly interesting as specimens of the ingenuity and eloquence of the Little Women, the plays may win their way into the répertoire of some stage-struck children. If so, they will find the greatest assistance in stage-managing, costuming, carpentering, and so forth, in the explanatory notes by Meg, who has given explicit instructions as to how two or three enterprising little persons can do the work of a whole company of actors; how one may be now a witch of fearful mien, and next a lovely lady in distress, and then a knight in martial guise. Instructions as to amateur cave-making, castle-making and forest-growing are given, too, as the scenes in which these are needed appear. Fearful, indeed, was the earnestness of the little people who wrote and played these mock-heroics – an earnestness which now spends itself in weeping over stories like “Little Lord Fauntleroy” and “The Story of Patsy,” but which may
find more healthful expression in the activity demanded by these “Comic Tragedies.”

The book is arranged by Mrs. Anna B. Pratt, the Meg of “Little Women.”

The Dial 15.180
(16 December 1893): 401.

Like the voice of an old friend to the many girls whose hearts warm at the name of Louisa Alcott will come the “Comic Tragedies” (Roberts), written by “Jo and Meg,” and acted by “The Little Women.” This is a collection of six plays written and acted by Miss Alcott and her sisters when they were girls at home forty years ago. Though full of fantastic sentiment, overstrained feeling, and absurd situations, these youthful effusions show the play of a very lively imagination and a sparkle of dramatic fire.

The Independent 45.2352
(21 December 1893): 1726.

The pieces are somewhat bright and catchy, and have in them the spirit of “Little Women.”

The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art 76.1991
(23 December 1893): 719.

All readers of Little Women know “Jo” and “Meg,” the authors of Comic Tragedies (Sampson Low & Co.), a set of half a dozen plays that were acted by them when they were young girls in a barn adjoining their Concord house. The plays are somewhat Radcliffian in diction, and in sentiment like unto the fiction of the Minerva Press. How the two girls contrived to play four, five, or six different characters in one drama is a secret which the present volume reveals.

“Comic Tragedies.” The Literary News n.s. 14.12
(Christmas, 1893): 371.

The many thousand readers of all ages to whom Miss Alcott’s books have given hours of profound delight will feel a thrill of genuine sentiment when they take up “Comic Tragedies.” For these are the veritable dramas that the “Little Women” acted in garret or barn in the happy old days at Concord – dramas written and acted by “Jo” and “Meg” and presented before small but rapturous audiences in the days when the Alcott girls, aged from fifteen to seventeen years, were living through the events afterward made familiar to thousands in the pages of “Little Women.” These seven plays, now for the first time collected and published, were written by Louisa Alcott, together with her sister Anna (“Meg”). As might be expected, Louisa is responsible for the greater part of the productions; her soul delighted in tragic scenes, blood-curdling mysteries and thrilling effects, and in these dramas she gave free rein to her vivid imagination, leaving gentle “Meg” to “do the love parts.” “Comic tragedies” they are indeed – stories of love and hate, wonderful in the sorrows that virtue experiences at
the hands of villainy, prolific in haunted chambers, lonely dungeons, ghosts, fairies, witches, bandits, sorcery, jealousy, and murder; yet even their incongruities, absurdities and extravagances are remarkable for the manifest sincerity that characterized the young dramatists and their simple unconsciousness of the absurdities they were perpetrating. More than one of these plays shows gleams of insight and perception of stage effect that one can hardly help regretting was not more cherished and led to bear maturer fruit in the dramatic field. The “foreword” by “Meg” is a charming, graphic account of those happy stage-struck days, that comes like a late and unexpected glimpse at the dear home-circle of the “Little Women.” “Comic Tragedies” is bound uniform with Miss Alcott’s other books, and should be added to every row of the brown volumes, as the completion of the set.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices

Boston Commonwealth 33.2 (19 August 1893): 7:3.
# Index

A. 291
A., Alan 91
A—, Flo. 340
Abbott, Jacob 316
Rollo books 247
Franconia books 247
Abbott, Lyman xvi, 18, 78, 95, 109, 147, 165, 177, 208, 258, 272
Academy 92, 255, 321, 329, 338, 351, 355, 367, 374
Adams, Annie 87
Adams, William T. (pseud. Oliver Optic) 235–38, 260
Boat Club Series 113
Brave Old Salt 236
Starry Flag Series 113
Sunny Shores 236, 237
Advance 101, 139
Aïdé, Charles Hamilton 213–14
In that State of Life 213–14
Albany Evening Journal 61
Alcott, A. Bronson 11, 41, 61, 98, 134, 137, 154–55, 269, 337, 351, 369, 386
Alcott, Abba May 154–55, 335, 386
Alcott, Anna 385–89
Alcott, Elizabeth 376
Alcott, Louisa May
“Anna’s Whim” 265–66, 270, 273
Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag xiii, xv, 87, 185
Cupid and Chow-Chow (vol. 3) 178, 179, 224, 227–32
Jimmy’s Cruise in the Pinafore (vol. 5) 325–30
My Boys (vol. 1) 161–67, 176, 229, 231
My Girls (vol. 4) 307–12
Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving, An (vol. 6) 56–58, 341–45
Shawl-Straps (vol. 2) xiii, 19, 20, 85, 158, 166, 169–79, 219, 229, 231
Aunt Kipp 53, 55
“Autobiography of an Omnibus, The” 310
“Baa, Baa!” 355
“Banners of Beaumanoir, The” 351
“Baron’s Gloves, The” 56, 57
“Bianca” 386
“Blind Lark, The” 381
“Boys’ Joke, The” 310
“Brownie and the Princess, The” 5, 6
“By the River” 266, 271
Camp and Fireside Stories 7, 14–20
“Candy Country, The” 355, 356
“Corny’s Catamount” 350, 351
“Centennial Love Story, A,” see Alcott, Louisa May, “Independence, A Centennial Love Story”
“Children’s Joke, The” 165, 166
“Christmas Dream, A” 355
“Christmas Turkey and How it Came, A” 381
“Cockyloo” 355
Comic Tragedies 383–89
“Cooking Club, The” 350
“Country Christmas, A” 57
“Cupid and Chow-Chow” 231
“Daisy’s Jewel Box” 350–52
“Doll’s Journey from Minnesota to Maine, The” 343, 344
Eight Cousins xiv–xvi, 87–88, 90, 233–62, 333, 360
continued by Rose in Bloom 277–81
“Eva’s Visit to Fairyland” 6
“Fairy Box, The” 355
“Fairy Pinafores” 231
“Fairy Sleeping Beauty, The” 6
“Fancy’s Friend” 343
Flower Fables xi, 1–6, 71, 373
“Frost King, The” 6
Garland for Girls, A xv, 6, 371–77
Good Wives xii, 205, 321
“Grandma’s Team” 231
“Hare and the Tortoise, The” 350
Alcott, Louisa May (cont.)
“Hole in the Wall, A” 355
“Howell Christmas, A” 16
Hospital Sketches xi, xv–xvi, 7–20, 23, 29, 40, 42, 72, 77, 85, 87, 118, 239, 240
compared to Moods 27, 29–31
compared to An Old-Fashioned Girl 95, 98, 105, 122, 126
“How, An” 16
“How it all Happened” 343
“How They Camped Out” 327
“Huckleberry” 230, 231
“Independence, A Centennial Love Story” 263, 266–68, 270–72
“Ivy Spray and Ladies’ Slippers, An” 373, 374
Jack and Jill xv, 331–40
“Jerseys” 352
“Jimmy’s Cruise in the Pinafore” 327–28
Jo’s Boys xv, 357–70
“Kate’s Choice” 229
“King of Clubs and the Queen of Hearts, The” 14
“Kitty’s Cattle Show” 327
Kitty’s Class-Day 53, 55–57
“Lettys Tramp” 266, 267, 272
“Lily-bell and Thistledown” 4
“Little Bud” 5
“Little Button-Rose” 373, 374
“Little Gulliver” 343
“Little House in the Garden, The” 350, 351
compared to Work 185, 193, 203, 205, 224
continued by Jo’s Boys 359, 362–65, 367–70
“Little Neighbors” 310
“Little Things” 351
compared to Eight Cousins 240, 242, 243, 249, 250, 254, 255, 257, 258
compared to Hospital Sketches 16, 18, 19
compared to Jack and Jill 333, 334, 337, 338
compared to Jo’s Boys 360, 362, 363, 369
compared to Little Men 134–40, 143–44, 146–48, 150–58, 364
compared to An Old-Fashioned Girl 95–99, 102, 104–05, 107–11, 116, 119, 122, 125–26, 129
compared to Work 185, 193, 196, 203, 205, 217, 224
series xii, xv, 55, 149, 159, 207, 219, 238, 241, 367, 368
Little Women Wedded xii
“Lost in a London Fog” 309, 310
“Love and Loyalty” 16
Lulu’s Library xv, xvi
Christmas Dream, A (vol. 1) 353–56
Frost King, The (vol. 2) 1–6
Recollections (vol. 3) 379–82
“Mamma’s Plot” 231
“Marjorie’s Three Gifts” 310
“May Flowers” 373, 374
“Mermaids” 6
“Modern Cinderella, The” 14, 16
Modern Mephistopheles, A xiv–xx, 283–305
Moods xi–xii, 25–45, 72, 83, 139, 149, 278, 302, 360
compared to Work 192, 193, 203, 223–24
“Morning Glories” 343
Morning Glories xii, 47–51
“Mountain Laurel and Maidenhair” 373, 374
“Mrs. Podgers’ Teapot” 14
“My Boys” 163, 166
“My Girls” 309–11
“My Contraband” 16
“My Rococo Watch” 273
“Naughty Jocko” 355
“Nelly’s Hospital” 231
Old-Fashioned Girl, An xii, xv, xvi, 19, 84, 85, 93–130, 134, 221, 238, 239–40, 248, 255, 317, 333, 338
compared to Little Men 135, 140, 153
compared to Work 193, 205, 224
“Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving, An” 343
“Old Major” 310, 311
On Picket Duty 21–23
“One Happy Birthday” 312
“Onawandah” 350, 351
“Pansies” 373, 374
“Patty’s Place” 310
“Piggy Girl, The” 355
“Poppies and Wheat” 373, 374
“Poppy’s Pranks” 343
Proverb Stories xii, 6, 53, 56–58, 343, 345
Psyche’s Art 53, 55, 56
“Recollections of My Childhood” 381, 382
“Ripple, the Water-Sprite” 4, 6
“Romance of a Summer Day, The” 267
“Rosa’s Tale” 327

392
Rose in Bloom xiv, 87, 242, 243, 245, 246, 259, 275–81, 333, 360
“Roses and Forget-me-nots, The” 309, 310
“Rosy's Journey” 355
“Scarlet Stockings” 266, 267
“Seven Black Cats” 327
“Shadow-Children” 343, 344
“Silver Pitchers” 265, 267–68, 270–73
Silver Pitchers xv, 263–73
“Skipping Shoes, The” 355
Spinning-Wheel Stories xv, 6, 347–52, 355
“Strange Island, A” 343
“Sunshine and her Brothers and Sisters” 6
“Tabby’s Table Cloth” 350, 351
“Tessa’s Surprises” 163, 166
“Trudel’s Siege” 382
Under the Lilacs xv, 313–23
“Water Lilies” 373, 374
“Water Sprite,” see Alcott, Louisa May, “Ripple, the Water-Sprite”
“Whale’s Story, The” 344
“What a Shawl Did” 327
“What a Shovel Did” 329
“What Becomes of the Pins” 329
“What the Swallows Did” 51, 343
“Whisper in the Dark, A” 283, 302–05
Work xiii–xiv, xvii, 86, 181, 239, 248, 253, 255, 270
Alcott, May 61–63, 66, 68, 86, 171, 173, 311, 337
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (Carroll) 113, 356
Amber Gods, The (Spofford) 288, 291
American Literary Gazette 16, 29, 65, 85, 130, 139
Andersen, Hans Christian 113
Andrew, George T. 88, 89
Appletons’ Journal 92, 160, 167, 176, 179, 201, 224, 253, 262, 270
Arabian Nights 76
Arnim, Bettine von 41
Arthur's Home Magazine 18, 55, 66, 91, 117, 149, 206
Arthur's Illustrated Home Magazine, see Arthur's Home Magazine
Arthur’s Lady’s Home Magazine, see Arthur’s Home Magazine
Athenaeum xiii, xiv, 79, 111, 142, 166, 205, 249, 261, 271
Atlantic Monthly xii, xv–xvii, 9, 14, 44, 45, 72, 110, 262, 294, 339, 352, 361, 375
Augusta Chronicle (Maine) 67
Austen, Jane 32
Azarian (Spofford) 291
B., Bessie H. 340
B., H. B. 6
B., Julie 90
B., Lilie R. 352
B., O. B. 340, 352
B., Ruth J. 352
B., S. E. 255
Bangor Daily Whig (Maine) 50
Bartlett, Alice (a.k.a. Miss B.) 171, 173
Beecher, Henry Ward 145
Beecher, Mrs. Henry Ward [Eunice White Bullard] 77
Beethoven, Ludwig von 252
Berkshire County Eagle (Pittsfield, Mass.) 130
Bettine, see Arnim, Bettine von
Biglow Papers, The (Lowell) 198, 204
Blackwood’s Magazine 129
Boat Club Series (Adams) 113
Boccaccio, Giovanni 41
Boker, G. H. 189
Book Buyer 351
Book Exchange Weekly 315
Book News 387
Bookseller xiv, 92, 108, 136, 199, 262
Boston Beacon 302
Hospital Sketches serialized in 9–11, 13, 14, 16–18, 72
Boston Courier 4, 20, 39, 61, 71, 88, 91, 100, 201, 229, 237, 238, 287, 309, 318, 323, 333, 343, 349, 361, 385
Boston Cultivator 10
Boston Daily Transcript, see Boston Evening Transcript
Boston Daily Traveller 23, 185, 240, 266, 267, 285, 289, 290, 303, 305
Boston Evening Traveller, see Boston Daily Evening Traveller
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emmanuel, Victor</td>
<td>174, 177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Esmond</em> (Thackeray)</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays (Emerson)</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans, Augusta Jane (Augusta Jane Evans-Wilson)</td>
<td>76, 288, 299, 301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>St. Elmo</em></td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans, Mary Ann (pseud. George Eliot)</td>
<td>151, 215, 251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Middlemarch</em></td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mill on the Floss, The</em></td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans-Wilson, Augusta Jane, see Evans, Augusta Jane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewing, Juliana Horatia</td>
<td>261, 367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Gartney’s <em>Girlhood</em></td>
<td>84, 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Faust</em> (Goethe)</td>
<td>294, 298–300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher, Frances (pseud. Christian Reid)</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzball, Edward</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleming, George</td>
<td>296, 299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>For Summer Afternoons</em> (Woolsey)</td>
<td>268, 272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster, George E.</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox, Emily</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frothingham, Octavius Brooks</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Transcendentalism in New England: A History</em></td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruitlands</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuller, Margaret</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G—, Hilda</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gage, Meta</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galaxy</td>
<td>68, 78, 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Game of Life, The</em> (Retzsch)</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gannon, Susan R.</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrison, Mattie A.</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gates Ajar, The (Phelps)</td>
<td>84, 145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayworthys, The (Whitney)</td>
<td>84, 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gemini</em> (Fox)</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generva</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert, William S. has <em>H. M. S. Pinafore</em></td>
<td>328–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilder, Jeannette L.</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von</td>
<td>28, 32, 41, 285–87, 289, 290, 294, 296, 298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Elective Affinities</em></td>
<td>28, 32, 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Faust</em></td>
<td>294, 298–300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Golden Age</em></td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodrich, Samuel G. (pseud. Peter Parley)</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic (London)</td>
<td>83, 367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Match, The (Trowbridge)</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene, Elizabeth B.</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Guiding Star</em></td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gussie</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Guy Livingstone</em> (Lawrence)</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H., A. W.</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hale, Edward Everett</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Our New Crusade</em></td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hale, Sarah J.</td>
<td>117, 166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton, Gail, see Dodge, Mary A.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hamlet</em> (Shakespeare)</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Handbook of English Literature: American Authors, A</em> (Underwood)</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Harper’s New Monthly Magazine</em> xvi, 18, 45, 58, 78, 95, 109, 147, 165, 177, 208, 258, 272, 312, 323, 330, 338, 345</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Harper’s Weekly</em></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harte, Bret</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hartford Daily Courant, see Hartford Courant</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorne, Julian xiv, 286–88, 294, 299, 301, 302</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bressant</em></td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Garth</em></td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Idolatry</em></td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorne, Nathaniel xiv, 29, 41, 143, 154, 269, 271, 285, 286, 290</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Scarlet Letter, The</em></td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hearth and Home</em></td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>262, 349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helmke, Anna</td>
<td>258, 262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hewins, Caroline</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higginson, Thomas Wentworth</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillard, Daisy</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. M. S. <em>Pinafore</em> (Gilbert)</td>
<td>328–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holm, Saxe, see Jackson, Helen Hunt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holmes, Oliver Wendell</td>
<td>301, 363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Elsie Venner</em></td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Home Journal</em> (Boston)</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Home Journal</em> (New York)</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoppin, Augustus</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoppner, John</td>
<td>145–46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hours at Home</em></td>
<td>64, 76, 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howe, Julia Ward</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howells, William Dean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Chance Acquaintance, A</em></td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt, Helen, see Jackson, Helen Hunt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Idylls of the King</em> (Tennyson)</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Illustrations of Political Economy</em> (Martineau)</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
National Anti-Slavery Standard xv, 10, 17, 49, 51, 65, 72, 91

Nellie 262

New Age 289

New Atmosphere, A (Dodge) 27

New-Bedford Mercury (Mass.) 268

New Bedford Standard (Mass.) 224

New England Farmer 12

New Engander 92, 179, 225

New Magalen, The (Collins) 215

New Orleans Daily Picayune 103, 281, 321, 323

New Orleans Times 124

New Year's Bargain, The (Woolsey) 262

New York Daily Graphic 193, 238

New York Evening Mail 138, 224

New York Evening Post 185, 225, 299, 387

New York Standard 50


P., C. L. 115

P., E. M. 72

P.—, Frances 352

P., M. A. M. 352

Pacific California 156

Page, Henrietta E. 160

Fall Mall Gazette 322

Parker, Theodore 41, 184, 188, 191, 194, 198, 202, 203, 205, 209, 217, 223, 225

Parley, Peter, see Goodrich, Samuel G.

Peg Woffington (Reade) 220

Pendennis (Thackeray) 360

Perpetual Curate, The (Oliphant) 28

Petrarch, Francesco 41

Pheps, Elizabeth Stuart 84, 91

Gates Ajar, The 84, 145

Philadelphia American 42

Philadelphia Inquirer 19, 126

Philadelphia North American 290

Philadelphia Post 126

Philadelphia Presbyterian 126

Philadelphia Press 158

Phillips, Wendell 41

Pilgrim's Progress (Bunyan) 65, 75, 82, 83, 297

Pittsburgh Gazette 82

Poe, Edgar Allan 215

Portland Advertiser (Maine) 98

Portland Transcript (Maine) 51

Pratt, Anna B., see Alcott, Anna

Prescott, W. H. 143

Preston, H. W.

Is That All 299

Prisoners of Poverty (Campbell) 374, 375

Providence Daily Journal 31, 49, 62, 75, 89, 106, 142, 164, 167, 179, 246, 270, 279, 287, 310, 328, 337, 344, 373

Providence Press 166

Providence Sunday Journal 4, 301, 302, 364, 377, 381, 382, 385, 389

Publishers’ Weekly 246, 268, 318

Punch 67, 109

Punchinello 107

Putnam's Magazine 20, 58, 67, 78

Quarrels of Authors (Disraeli)

Queechy (Warner) 84

R,—, Julia 381

Raleigh, Walter 41

Ramée, Marie Louise de la (Ouida) 298

Raphael (Rafaelle) 109

Reade, Charles

Peg Woffington 220
T—, Belle 381
“Talking Oak, The” (Tennyson) 143
Taylor, Bayard
Under the Ban 28
Templeton 3, 42, 73, 273, 288, 292, 316, 333, 362
Tennyson, David 149
Tennyson, Alfred 34
Idylls of the King 298
“Talking Oak, The” 143
Thacher, Mary 196, 218
Thackeray, William Makepeace 246, 251, 257, 360, 361
Esmond 299
Newcomes, The 257
Pendennis 360
Rose and the Ring, The 257
Vanity Fair 360
Theophilus and Others (Dodge) 272
Thoreau, Henry David 41, 279
Transcendentalism in New England: A History (Frothingham) 271
Trollope, Anthony 246
Trowbridge, J. T. 258, 311
Great Match, The 299
Tulloch, W. W. 322
Turner, J. M. W. 186, 291
Slave Ship, The 291
Twain, Mark, see Clemens, Samuel

Under the Ban (Taylor) 28
Underwood, Francis H. 189
Handbook of English Literature: American Authors, A 189
Union Jurassienne 87
Unitarian Review 271, 280
Utopia (More) 142

V., Josie 352
Vanity Fair (Thackeray) 360
Very, Jones 41
Voltaire 115

W—, Adda 352
W., L. 91
W., Mamie S. 352
Walpole 96

Warner, Charles Dudley 171
Warner, Susan (pseud. Elizabeth Wetherell) 84, 147
Queechy 84
Wide, Wide World, The 84, 85
Warren, William 191, 223, 224
Warrington, see Robinson, William S.
Washington Capital 143
Washington Chronicle 222
Washington Herald 127
Waterbury American 10, 158
Waverley Magazine 291
Westminster Quarterly Review 87, 178, 232, 280
Wetherell, Elizabeth, see Warner, Susan
Whipple, Edwin 179
Whitney, A. D. T. 84, 113–14, 185, 192, 195, 199, 225, 248
Faith Gartney’s Girlhood 84, 85
Gayworthys, The 84, 85
Other Girls, The 185, 192, 205, 225
Wide, Wide World, The (Warner) 84, 85
Wide World 13
Wiggin, Kate Douglas
Story of Patsy, The 387
Wilbur, Emma G. 129
Wingate, Charles E. 389
Woman’s Journal 291
Woolsey, Sarah Chauncy (pseud. Susan Coolidge) 252, 262, 268
Eyebright 328
For Summer Afternoons 268, 272
New-Year’s Bargain, The 262
Nine Little Goslings 262
Worcester Evening Gazette 95, 97, 138, 189
Wordsworth, William 41, 145
Wyss, Johann Rudolf
Swiss Family Robinson, The 112

X. 30

Yonge, Charlotte 84
Youth’s Companion xvi, 64, 231, 382

Zion’s Herald xv, 6, 9, 16, 19, 42, 63, 75, 89, 102, 146, 165, 175, 230, 244, 269, 280, 290, 312, 320, 327, 335, 350, 364