

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT.

"Give us a story by Miss Alcott!" "I like 'Little Women' better than any other book on my shelf." "I have read all Miss Alcott's books, and love her dearly," are among the frequent expressions for which I have learned to look in the Children's letters, writes Mrs. Sangster in *Harper's Young People*. The sweet, true-hearted woman, whose death at Roxbury, Massachusetts, on March 6th, has "eclipsed the gayety" of childhood, was, as Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes strikingly said, the "Hans Christian Anderson and Daniel Defoe of America." The candor and simplicity, the winning directness, the breezy freshness, and the sturdy scorn of anything mean or underhanded, which mark her writings, make them peculiarly wholesome and free from taint. "She is such a good fellow," said an enthusiastic boy, getting up from an afternoon's absorption in "Little Men," with a feeling that at least one woman in the world knew all about boy nature, and sympathized with boys in their trials and aspirations. Every little girl who has ever read a story of Miss Alcott's has had a sense of cuddling close up to the author and leaning against her knee, while she heard her fascinating talk, so magically did the winsome voice speak through the silent type.

I heard a touching incident last summer, illustrative of the life-likeness with which Miss Alcott invested her heroines. It was at a hamlet in Maine, where a lady, tarrying for a holiday rest, had established a tiny lending library for the children of the place. It had only a few volumes all told, but among them was included the "Old-fashioned Girl," and this speedily became the favorite book, passing rapidly from hand to hand, and eagerly waited for by those whose turn had not yet come. One pleasant afternoon, as the lady sat in her cosy little parlor, her dainty knitting on her lap, a bare-footed child, panting, flushed, excited, pushed open the door, exclaiming, without other preface: "Is she in? Is she in?"

"Is who in?" naturally inquired the lady. "The Old-fashioned Girl," was the quick reply. "I've been picking blackberries all day, and I've walked three miles to get her and take her home with me."

"But," said the lady, appreciating the child's humor, "she's not fit to go out again until I have had time to mend her dress. See, my dear. The leaves are loosened from the binding, and the poor Old-fashioned Girl is in a sad plight."

"I'll mend her up, if you'll only let me take her away," pleaded the little berry-picker, departing in an ecstasy to tramp three miles homeward over a rough road with Miss Alcott's book hugged to her breast. Imagine how she pored over it by the light of the evening lamp in the family sitting-room!

Yes, the children have lost a friend, and there is hardly a household where English is spoken in any part of the globe in which Miss Alcott has not had honest mourners among the boys and girls. These will like to know something about her life.

Louisa May Alcott was born on November 29, 1832, in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Her father, A. Bronson Alcott, was a distinguished lecturer and teacher of his time, one of the first at a period when schoolmasters were very severe, ruling principally by harsh methods, to insist that gentleness was more influential than the rod, and to show that education should bring out the best that was in a child's nature, not simply cram a young mind with facts.

His daughter Louisa was born on her father's birthday, and it is beautiful to learn that as all their lives they kept this pleasant anniversary together the gentle angel of death took them home at almost the same time. Only a day intervened between Mr. Alcott's death and that of the child who had been his constant companion and tender friend during all her life. The genial and gentle philosopher, whose ideas had furnished food for thought to some of the most eminent people of the century, was eighty-nine; just a year old, you see, when 1860 came in. Miss Alcott's mother was a May, a descendant of the Sewell and Quincy families of Boston. Mrs. Alcott died in 1877, and the daughter more than ever devoted herself to her father in his

loneliness. In 1882 a stroke of paralysis rendered him very dependent on her constant care and nursing, and she gave herself without stint to ministering to his need. About three years ago, when she was busy on "Jo's Boys," her health broke down, no doubt from overstrain, and her physicians forbade her writing any more. This injunction, however, was only partially obeyed, for at each recurring holiday it was hard to withstand the clamors of the children all over the world for a Christmas story from their beloved Miss Alcott; and when a friend asked her for only a verse or two, for charity's sake, at the Yuletide, she wrote sweetly, "The doctors say no; but I can deny you nothing at Christmas time."

A backward glance over Miss Alcott's life is interesting. We may fancy her a romping, merry child, in the days when little maidens wore stout stuff dresses in winter and calico in summer, and were not afraid to climb fences, nor coast with their brothers. But she was studious too, and with such teachers as her father and Mr. Thoreau, she would receive as many lessons from Nature as from books.

At sixteen she followed in the footsteps of the New England girl of her day, and began to teach school. No doubt her

went to Europe, where she spent a year in pleasant loitering and travel.

Although Miss Alcott began to write when she was only sixteen, she waited a great while before she had any marked success. The Amy, Jo, Beth, and Meg of her "Little Women" were real girls, herself and her sisters, and the lives in the book were very much the lives which had been lived in the cheerful home hive with her own dear father and mother. Neither author nor publisher expected a golden harvest to follow the appearance of this unpretending little volume: but the children hailed it with acclamation, and 87,000 copies were sold in less than three years. Indeed to this day, although many gifted pens have been occupied in the interest of the children, and many lovely stories have been written for them, this is yet in demand. No juvenile library for nearly twenty-one years has been complete without this charming book, whose title was a happy thought, a real inspiration.

Since 1867, when "Little Women" carried our hearts by storm, Miss Alcott has been a diligent literary worker, seldom taking for herself any leisure. Fame and fortune came to her. In addition to her other work, she "mothered" the daughter of her dead sister May, her pet and darling,



THE LATE LOUISA MAY ALCOTT.

pupils liked her, but she found teaching irksome, and felt her call to a wider work than could be found within four walls. Her big school-room, although she did not know it then, was to be the wide world. For, so long as she lived, the dear lady was a teacher, each of her books, under the fun and frolic, the record of home happenings, and the bright conversation, having some moral lesson to convey. Children are kinder, more unselfish, braver and more independent, through the influence of her words. Nobody who did not love children could have so understood what they wanted.

During the civil war, Miss Alcott served for some time as a volunteer nurse at Georgetown, near Washington. The work was hard, the watching and anxiety painful, and together induced an attack of typhoid fever, of which she nearly died. Never after this was she so strong as in her earlier years, when she laughed at the thought of an ailment, and could endure great fatigues without inconvenience. After the war she published a book entitled "Hospital Sketches," telling about her experience in nursing the sick and wounded soldiers. This was followed by "Moods," and then she

bringing up her niece in accordance with her own theories to be robust in body and healthy in mind, pure-hearted, joyous, and true. "An Old-fashioned Girl" set her sweet pattern of girls as Miss Alcott thought they ought to be in 1869. "Little Men" made their bow to us in 1871. "Aunt Jo's Scrap-bag" came out for Santa Claus's special benefit, and one by one, each secure beforehand of a cordial welcome, her pretty household stories followed. The children know their names by heart—"Eight Cousins," "Rose in Bloom," "Under the Lilacs," "Spinning-wheel Stories," "Jo's Boys" and the rest.

It was a beautiful, brave, bright life which closed on the March morning when the daffodils she loved were lighting their torches for the spring. Probably she did not know, so soon had unconsciousness set in upon her brain, that the dear father was gone. And, I fancy, very sweet must have been the surprise when the two, whose mortal lives had been as one, met face to face in the fair land where there is no death, nor any more pain, nor tears, nor trouble.

To pay your own way, to stand upon your own feet, to serve God, and love your

neighbor, are the motives of Miss Alcott's work for children. She amused and entertained them not only, she elevated and stimulated them to a higher plane and nobler living. Especially do mothers owe her a debt for the common-sense light, free from silly or morbid sentiment, in which she set the friendships of boys and girls, every one of her books being pure, sweet-toned, and natural. We are sorry, with the children, that she is gone.

IF I WERE A VOICE.

CHARLES MACKEY.

If I were a voice—a persuasive voice—

That could travel the wide world through,
I would fly on the beams of the morning light,
And speak to men with a gentle might,

And tell them to be true.

I'd fly, I'd fly o'er land and sea,

Wherever a human heart might be,

Telling a tale, or singing a song,

In praise of the right, in blame of the wrong.

If I were a voice—a consoling voice—

I'd fly on the wings of air:

The homes of sorrow and guilt I'd seek,

And calm and truthful words I'd speak,

To save them from despair.

I'd fly, I'd fly o'er the crowded town,

And drop, like the happy sunlight, down

Into the suffering hearts of men,

And teach them to rejoice again.

If I were a voice—a convincing voice—

I'd travel with the wind;

And whenever I saw the nations torn

By warfare, jealousy, or scorn,

Or hatred of their kind,

I'd fly, I'd fly on the thunder-crash,

And into their blinded bosoms flash,

And, all their evil thoughts subdued,

I'd teach them Christian brotherhood.

If I were a voice—a pervading voice—

I'd seek the kings of earth;

I'd find them alone on their beds at night,

And whisper words that should guide them
right—

Lessons of priceless worth,

I'd fly more swift than the swiftest bird,

And tell them things they never heard—

Truths which the ages for aye repeat,

Unknown to the statesmen at their feet.

If I were a voice—an immortal voice—

I'd speak in the people's ear;

And whenever they shouted "Liberty!"

Without deserving to be free,

I'd make their mission clear.

I'd fly, I'd fly on the wings of day,

Rebuking wrong on my world-wide way,

And making all the earth rejoice—

If I were a voice—an immortal voice.

TEMPERANCE ARITHMETIC.

Please work out this problem and think it over:—

A young man, now 21 years old, began to smoke cigarettes at the age of 14, and smoked 10 cents' worth daily. How many books, at \$1 each, could he buy with the money spent?

The 4,000 saloons in San Francisco take in daily an average of \$10 each; how many dollars are paid daily in that city for liquor?

PRAYING TO A LETTER-BOX.

We are so accustomed to the conveniences of the post-office system in our country that we think little of them, but to the poor natives of India some of them are deemed objects of worship and to be propitiated with gifts:

In one case a man posted his letter in the box and shouted out its destination, to inform the presiding spirit whom he supposed to be inside.

Another native humbly took off his shoes as he approached the box, went through various devotions before and after posting his letter, and finally put some coppers before the box as a propitiatory offering, retiring in the same attitude of humility.—*Youth's Companion*.

FRICTION—"O Frank! come and see how hot my saw gets when I rub it." "That's the friction," said Frank, with the wisdom of two years more than Eddie boasted. "Yes," said sister Mary, who was passing, "it's the friction; and it makes me think of two boys who were quarrelling over a trifle this morning, and the more they talked the hotter their tempers grew, until there was no knowing what might have happened if mother had not thrown cold water on the fire by sending them into separate rooms."—*Child's Paper*.