# LOUISA ALCOTT

*Born* at Germantown, Penn., November 29 ,1832.
*Died* at Roxbury, March 6, 1888.

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*From a photograph in the possession of Mr F. B. Sanborn, Concord, U.S.A.*

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OF Louisa Alcott it may be said that her books were made up of personal experiences, and that to the widening of those experiences the writing of her books largely contributed. This may seem a somewhat paradoxical statement, but it is literally true, as we shall hope to show in this paper.

Her best work is that in which she speaks of the things which she has seen and known, and the things themselves are vitalised and ennobled by the long apprenticeship to her pen which began when she was but ten years old. Her life was no ordinary one: it brimmed over with incident. Hardships which would have caused many a girl hours of fruitless mortification were glorified by her into bits of amusing melodrama, and in a world of imaginary luxury she forgot all actual privations.

Her parents — Amos Bronson and Abba May Alcott — came of good old English stock, whose pedigree dated back to the early days of the

seventeenth century. Her father's family could not be reckoned among those fortunate few who reaped golden harvests out of the soil of the New World, for at the time when Amos was born his father was only a small farmer and he himself began life as a peddlar. Such a career, however, was not long possible for such a man, and he soon showed great aptitude both for learning and teaching. We are not aware of the circumstances under which he first met his wife, but it was inevitable that the two natures would be infinitely fascinating the one to the other,

The noble and high-souled idealist and the brave noble-hearted woman were all in all to each other always; but, as Louisa says somewhere, "All the philosophy in our house is not in the study: a good deal is in the kitchen, where a fine old Lady thinks high thoughts and does kind deeds while she cooks and scrubs."

Louisa May Alcott was the second daughter, and was born on her father's thirty-third birthday, November 29, 1832. From her earliest years she seems to have shown unusual intelligence and unselfishness, and having no brothers she "made believe" to be a boy. Her three sisters— Anna, Elizabeth, and May— were willing enough to have it so, though sometimes her ultra-boyish pranks were distinctly trying to the more sober-minded youngest.

When Louisa was two years old the family removed to Boston, where for six years Mr Alcott carried on a school in the Masonic Temple. His gift for teaching was remarkable, and Emerson was enthusiastic in his praise, describing him as "a man whose conversation is unrivalled in its way — such insight, such discernment of spirits, such pure intellectual play, such revolutionary impulses of thought."

But he was a pure idealist, and the reputation which he obtained for heresy and abolitionism soon served to break up his school. Intellectually Boston has some likeness to Edinburgh. There is the same width of wisdom to be found there, and it is the apex of transatlantic learning. But there the similarity ends, for instead of the "old city" there are the frame-houses of American build, and instead of ancient cathedrals there are only the State House and its collateral buildings. There are some churches, of course,— but Bostonians thought then, and probably still think, that its civic life is better served by a well-ordered democratic polity than by theology, while the religious atmosphere is not Presbyterian but Unitarian.

"The Church," as popularly considered, was a rigid and formalistic institution in those days— a mixture of Pharisaic propriety and priestly lukewarmness,— while Unitarianism stood for all that was cordial, sympathetic, and inspiring; so it is