The little niece was indeed an unspeakable comfort.

"The touch of the dear little hands seems to take away the bitterness of grief. The sight of the little head is like sunshine to me;" and the daily unfolding of the sweet nature was a constant interest and delight both to Mr and Miss Alcott.

'Jo's Boys,' 'Lulu's Library,' and many short stories, were subsequently published at intervals; but they were the results of intermittent work, for she was "too busy singing lullabies" to write much, and though the charm of her style never fails, there is not the same overflowing exuberance of spirits that is so conspicuous in her earlier writings.

The sudden death of R.W. Emerson in 1882 was the last keen sorrow that she was called upon to bear,— he who had helped her most of all, by his life, his books, his society, from the time when, as a child, she had "browsed" in his library and sung Mignon's song under his window. He had been her hero always, and a worthy one. In shadow and in sunshine his untiring friendship had never failed her.

"I can never tell all he has been to me," she exclaims, and probably many a one might say the same, who has been helped through weary hours of self-conflict by his manly outspokenness and large-hearted sympathetic charity.

Dr O. W. Holmes touchingly says of him: "Judged by his life, Emerson comes very near our best ideal of humanity; and if He who knew what was in man had wandered from door to door in New England as of old in Palestine, we can well believe that one of the thresholds which 'those blessed feet' would have crossed, to hallow and receive its welcome, would have been that of the lovely and quiet home of Emerson."

A few months later Mr Alcott was stricken with paralysis; but for six years he lingered, slowly declining, "changed from a hale, handsome old man into this pathetic wreck."

Still the brave daughter worked on, though forbidden by the doctor to work at much length or at anything requiring thought or labour. It was second nature to her to love herself last, but the time came when the tired nerves could no longer bear the strain of family life and when she longed to be alone. "I don't want to live if I can't be of use," was her cry, and so on to the end she laboured with brain and hand.

In December 1886 she went to live at Roxbury, where, in the quiet home of her friend Dr Rhoda Lawrence, she found, during the last fifteen months of her life, the rest which had now become absolutely essential.

To be living apart from her family was terrible to her, but her nerves were so utterly prostrated

by overwork that the companionship of even those whom she best loved had become an impossibility.

Every week she drove in to "kiss my people for fifteen minutes"; but her father's life on earth was wellnigh ended, and early in March 1888 she drove back from what she felt to be her last visit.

Full of the sadness of that parting, she forgot some necessary precautions for herself, and on the morning of the next day she awoke in great agony. Brain trouble rapidly set in, and in a few hours all was over on this side heaven. She never knew until she got there that her father had gone on before. By her express wish the funeral service was very simple. It was held in her father's room at Boston, and only a few of her immediate circle were allowed to attend.

From all the busy bustle of the city they carried her to Concord, that ideal little New England town where, in the beautiful cemetery of "Sleepy Hollow," so many of America's "good workmen" lie resting: past the meadows where she and her sisters had played out the "Pilgrim's Progress," where the river Musketaquid lounges its lazy way till it is lost in the waters of the Merrimac; past the ponds of Walden, which had been huge lakes to the childish eyes, and the green hills that had seemed so close against the sky.

Reverently they laid her body across the feet of her father, mother, and "little Beth," so that

even in death she might seem to take care of those whom in life she had so lovingly cherished.

The sunshine of early spring touched the mountain-peaks into glory, and the clouds danced over the hill-tops just as in the old days when the little quartette of Alcott girls had "played pilgrims" among the pine groves. For three of them the gates of the Celestial City had opened, and within the presence of the Master they now stood in "clothes of immortality." Rejoicingly they gather together once more

"In the broad blessed light and perfect air, with meadows, rippling tides and flowers and grass
And the low hum of living breeze— and in the midst God's beautiful eternal right hand."[1]

It is a truism that personal testimony has a unique value in convincingness. It always has been considered so— the mythical Dives was only voicing this belief when with such thrilling humanness he prayed that it might be given to his brethren. It always will be considered so,— do not we in our daily doings contrive to link ourselves, sometimes almost unconsciously, with those persons and things the character of whom and the value of which have been vouched for by men who have respectively proved them?

The fact forced itself very pleasantly upon us on receipt of the following kind letter from Mr

[1] Walt Whitman.

F.B. Sanborn, which accompanied a photograph of Louisa Alcott for special reproduction in this volume.

Mr Sanborn was one of the four privileged mourners who in 1858 carried little "Beth" from her old home, in the orchard-house at Concord, to the new one at Sleepy Hollow, chosen by herself. The other three bearers were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau of Walden, and Mr John Pratt ("John Brooke" of 'Little Women'), who afterwards married Anna Alcott. This is not the only time that Mr Sanborn's friendship is mentioned in Louisa Alcott's letters and diaries, and always in connection with men who have made Concord a name of quite special interest in the literary annals of America. In December 1859 John Brown of Harper's Ferry ("St John the Just," as his friends affectionately styled him) was executed as a common malefactor, and when all Concord gathered at an indignation meeting, R.W. Emerson, H.D. Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, and F. B. Sanborn spoke,— "full of reverence and admiration for the martyr." If a man may be known by his companions, then F.B. Sanborn must possess a personality as delightful as those better-known Americans of whom he writes so eloquently, for the Hawthornes, Theodore Parker, Garrison, Channing, and Phillips also formed part of that brilliant circle which seemed centrifugally

to draw into it all that was fresh, strong, and beautiful in those days.

Mr Sanborn tells us of the photograph that—

"It was given me by Louisa in the days nearly forty years since, when I used to join her in charades and private theatricals, and in the school celebrations under her father's direction as Superintendent of our Concord schools. The exact date I cannot fix, but it is either just before or just after her first great literary success in 'Little Women' (1868), which she wrote in her father's orchard-house, where a dozen years later we opened, under her father's direction, the Summer School of Philosophy and Literature. I also send you in another cover an article of mine in 'The New York Critic' of April last, which contains one priceless anecdote about the family in its extreme poverty— the letter of Miss Robie— never before published, which may be of service to you in your forthcoming chapter on Miss Alcott. It has been in my hands for at least thirty years, but I have found no reason for printing it before.

"Louisa was never thoroughly well after recovering from the almost fatal hospital fever. Naturally she was of abundant animal spirits, buoyant and resolute, and all through her youth, save in certain moods of depression, the gayest of girls and the life of the company of the young — essentially cheerful and just."

This personal testimony to the charm of "Jo" must surely warm the hearts of all those who have been cheered into laughter or softened into tears by the humour and pathos of 'Little Women' or 'Under the Lilacs.'

The "priceless anecdote" told by Miss Robie speaks for itself. Writing from the Alcott cottage, in December 1841, when the family were very poor but very generous, she says:—

"I did not dare to go to Concord without carrying tea and coffee and a small piece of cooked meat, in case my wayward stomach should crave it, which last article was a little piece of *a la mode* beef. Thus provided, I arrived at the Alcott cottage just after dark of a Friday evening. I got into the house before they heard me, and found them seated around their bread and water. I had a most cordial welcome from Mrs Alcott and the children. She said to me: 'O you dear creature! you are the one I should have picked out of all the good people in Boston. How thankful I am to see you!' I had a comfortable cup of tea in a few minutes, for I did not dare to go without. (They then opened a bundle, in which were clothes for the children, sent by Mrs J.S. of Boston.) Mr Alcott sat looking on like a philosopher. 'There,' said he, 'I told you that you need not be anxious about cloth-