

sorely aching limbs, and two months later she retired to quiet lodgings in Boston, where she was always able to work with more persistence and rapidity than at home.

The dream of twenty years was more than fulfilled, and at forty she had secured the independence of the family, paid every debt, and settled her mother in a pleasant home, "with no work, no care, no poverty to worry, but peace and comfort all about her."

But the resources of the "golden goose" were by no means exhausted, and Roberts, Low, and Scribner clamoured for her books, while lion-hunters dodged her footsteps and waylaid her in odd corners. She was too thoroughly human not to enjoy the success for which she had so longed and laboured, but she was often tired of it all, and the nerve-exhaustion which followed some of her most delightful experiences made even pleasure toilsome.

Tall and striking-looking, though not really handsome, full of ready wit and quick sympathy, it is not surprising that she was a general favourite with rich and poor, old and young. Her quick and observant intelligence assimilated the varied elements that came into her life, and her best work is that in which she speaks with artistic simplicity of her own experiences. We are not surprised to hear that she had several good offers of marriage, but her inclinations never lay in that direction.

Love of her family was all-sufficing, and to all intents and purposes she was the helpful son and brother which in the old childish days she had "made believe" to be.

'A Modern Mephistopheles,' published in 1877, is so absolutely unlike anything else that Miss Alcott has written—so self-evidently influenced by reading rather than by experience—that it stands apart from all her other books. Being published in the "No-name Series" which Roberts Bros. were bringing out at this time, it created considerable interest, and, among others, the son of Nathaniel Hawthorne was suspected of its authorship. It is a very singular book, of much power and originality of plot, but not "convincing" enough to be considered as a thorough success.

It is written from outside only, and though she had much imagination, Louisa Alcott could not suddenly project her healthy mind into such unusual scenes and circumstances. She was now forty-five years of age, and the style which was most natural to her, and in which she achieved her greatest successes, was the result of long apprenticeship and much practice.

It is rather remarkable to notice how often writers who have succeeded in one branch of literature, long to use their talents in another. In February 1877 we find her writing in her Journal,

"Tired of providing moral pap for the young: long to write a novel, but cannot get time enough"; and the words do but echo the aspiration of the late Mrs Emma Marshall, who on several occasions lamented to us that she was too busy to devote herself to serious fiction—if such a phrase be allowable. She, too, never varied her style; and though her prolific writings— numbering over two hundred— found a ready sale and many admiring readers among the young, we can easily believe that she found it monotonous to cater solely for one class, and, if only as a matter of experiment, would gladly have written on more ambitious lines. But in both cases, though the relationships were different, it was "the family" of which both had to think, and money, honestly earned, being to both the end hoped for, there was no time for experiments when simpler work was so successful

'Moods' and 'Mephistopheles' stand apart among Miss Alcott's works, and in strange contrast to the latter were 'My Girls' and 'Under the Lilacs'— written under the very shadow of death, and finished by the bedside of her dying mother.

Mrs Alcott slipped peacefully away on the 25th of November 1877, and even the devoted daughter was "glad when the last weary breath was drawn and silence came." But for the time all motive

seemed to have gone out of her life, and it is from the depths of a very sad heart that we find her writing in her Journal, "My only comfort is that I could make her last years comfortable, and lift off the burdens she had carried so bravely all these years. I think I shall soon follow her, and am quite ready to go, now she no longer needs me." The poem *In Memoriam*, written by her at this time, is very beautiful, and worthy of a place in any anthology. Graceful fancy and devout faith are in it, but above all there is the tender and reverent affection which had made sweet every hardship which they had borne together.

In a sketch such as this, where we have endeavoured to show something of the character of Louisa Alcott in its varied developments, it may be interesting to quote it at length, and those who can "read between the lines" will see how characteristic the verses are, of all that is most conspicuous in her prose writings.

TRANSFIGURATION.

Mysterious death! who in a single hour
Life's gold can so refine,
And by thy art divine
Change mortal weakness to immortal power!

Bending beneath the weight of eighty years,
Spent with the noble strife
Of a victorious life,
We watched her fading heavenward, through our tears.

LOUISA ALCOTT.

But ere the sense of loss our hearts had wrung,
 A miracle was wrought;
 And swift as happy thought
She lived again,— brave, beautiful, and young.
Age, pain, and sorrow dropped the veils they wore,
 And showed the tender eyes
 Of angels in disguise,
Whose discipline so patiently she bore.
The past years brought their harvest rich and fair;
 While memory and love
 Together fondly wove
A golden garland for the silver hair.
How could we mourn like those who are bereft,
 When every pang of grief
 Found balm for its relief
In counting up the treasures she had left?
Faith that withstood the shocks of toil and time;
 Hope that defied despair;
 Patience that conquered care;
And loyalty, whose courage was sublime;
The great deep heart that was a home for all,—
 Just, eloquent, and strong
 In protest against wrong;
Wide charity, that knew no sin, no fall;
The Spartan spirit that made life so grand,
 Mating poor daily needs
 With high heroic deeds,
That wrested happiness from Fate's hard hand.
We thought to weep, but sing for joy instead,
 Full of the grateful peace
 That follows her release;
For nothing but the weary dust lies dead.
Oh, noble woman! never more a queen
 Than in the laying down
 Of sceptre and of crown
To win a greater kingdom, yet unseen;

Teaching us how to seek the highest goal
To earn the true success,—
To live, to love, to bless,—
And make death proud to take a royal soul.

Two years later we find the following entry in her Journal, which in its touching descriptiveness is typical of Miss Alcott in one of her tenderest moods:—

"*October* 8, 1879. Dear Marmee's birthday. Never forgotten. Lovely day. Go to Sleepy Hollow with flowers. Her grave is green; black-berry vines with red leaves trail over it. A little white stone with her initials is at the head, and among the tall grass over her breast a little bird had made a nest; empty now, but a pretty symbol of the refuge that tender bosom always was for all feeble and sweet things. Her favourite asters bloomed all about, and the pines sang overhead. So she and dear Beth are quietly asleep in God's acre, and we remember them more tenderly with each year that brings us nearer them and home."

But even her mother's death was not such a mental shock to Louisa as that of her youngest sister. The sad news was broken to her by Emerson, "our best and tenderest friend," but such a blow to such a nature was wellnigh overwhelming just then, when her heart was so lonely and sore.

Abba May, the youngest of the Alcotts, whom we

all know so well' as "Amy" in 'Little Women', was the pet of the whole family. From her earliest years Louisa had educated her out of her own earnings, and it was she who sent her to the School of Design, to the Boston School of Anatomy, and for two years of art studying in Paris and London in 1873 and 1876 respectively. May Alcott's artistic gifts were considerable, and with the best opportunities for developing them, she improved rapidly. One of her pictures of "still life" was accepted by the Paris Salon—well hung and well praised. This event gave great happiness to all at home, but to no one was it such a source of pride and pleasure as to the devoted and unselfish sister whose chief joy lay in helping others. Her Journal says, "I am proud to have her show what she can do, and have her depend upon no one but me. Success to little Raphael! My dull winter is much cheered by her happiness and success."

This entry is dated December 1876, but "little Raphael" never came home again.

While in London she became acquainted with a Swiss gentleman of congenial temperament and tastes. His kindness and sympathy during the sad time of bereavement, caused by her mother's death in October 1877, soon ripened into a love which was warmly reciprocated. Their simple marriage took place in March 1878, and they started for Paris almost immediately. Her art-

less pleasure in the new life is most ingenuously told in her letters, in which she says that her sisters at home would not recognise her, she has "become so sweet in this atmosphere of happiness."

But the joy of her loving relatives in her "idyllic dream" was soon overshadowed by intensest anxiety on her behalf, and two weeks after the birth of her baby girl she passed peacefully away— December 29, 1879.

"In all the troubles of my life," writes Louisa, "I never had one so hard to bear, for the sudden fall from such high happiness to such a depth of sorrow finds me unprepared to accept or bear it as I ought."

It was with a heart full of grief that she finished 'Jack and Jill'; but still she writes bravely, "I trust the misery did not get into the story, but I'm afraid it is not so gay as I meant most of it to be. A sweeter little romance has just ended in Paris than any I can ever make, and the sad facts of life leave me no heart for cheerful fiction."

During the next few years she devoted herself chiefly to the care of May's baby, the precious legacy left by the dying mother to the sister who had been her providence from babyhood, and by whom she knew that equal tenderness would be lavished upon her child.