not surprising to find that the religion of Boston mostly depended upon such exceptional men as Theodore Parker and his followers. The kindness of this "Orson of divines" to the home-sick Louisa in the after-days was as unfailing as it was disinterested; and in 1856 we find her "fighting" for him, when some less large-hearted guest, at the boarding-house where she was temporarily staying, said that he was "not a Christian." With the simple directness of her usual style she says, "He is *my sort,* for though he may lack reverence for other people's God he works bravely for his own, and turns his back on no one who needs help, as some of the pious do."

Mr and Mrs Alcott were ideal parents in the best sense of the word. No time or trouble was spared by them to make life a real and an earnest thing, not only for themselves but for their children, and they were richly rewarded by the loving loyalty of them all. One of Mrs Alcott's sayings was, "Cast thy bread upon the waters, and after many days it will come back buttered." Many a time did she see this verified, not only in her own life, but in the lives of others.

"Mr March" making compasses of his long legs and therewith drawing letters and diagrams for the edification of his little grandson, is a descriptive memory of Mr Alcott's early lessons to his own children; and we can imagine the delight of the

quartette of little girls as they gathered round their philosopher-father, who forgot his Plato and his philosophy in the joy of "the children's hour."

The school as a financial scheme was a failure, and in 1840 the family removed to Concord, where for two years, "the happiest of my life," the children revelled in the freedom of the country, and where every day disclosed fresh wonders to the little people who were still so "fresh from God." It was during these years that the lifelong friendship with Emerson began, from whom all the family were to receive such untold benefit— their "good angel," as Louisa afterwards called him. Here, too, they had the companionship of the little Emersons, Channings, Hawthornes, and Goodwins, while the seniors enjoyed congenial fellowship, and shared in all the frolics of their fun-loving children. For there was no Puritanism in the Concord cottage, and the Transcendental movement had not as yet invaded the family life.

"But that is another story," as Kipling says.

Dickens tells us in his ' American Notes':—

"There has sprung up in Boston a sect of philosophers known as Transcendentalists. On inquiring what this appellation might be supposed to signify, I was given to understand that whatever was unintelligible would be certainly Transcendental. Transcendentalism has its occasional vagaries (what school has not?), but it has good healthful qualities

in spite of them: not least among the number a hearty disgust of cant, and an aptitude to detect her in all the million varieties of her everlasting wardrobe. And therefore, if I were a Bostonian, I would be a Transcendentalist."

It was in effect a rebound from the meretricious ostentation of the American cities, a struggle for fresh air, a protest against the waste and aimlessness of luxury.

To reorganise life and to put things social on a higher plane had always been one of Mr Alcott's dreams; but, until his visit to England in 1842, he had not attempted to put his theories into practice. On this occasion, however, he fell in with some kindred spirits, as he supposed, who were willing to exploit the new ideas in a practical(?) fashion. They returned with him to America, and in 1843 this strangely-assorted band took possession of a farm with fourteen acres of ground about twenty miles from Concord, in which they proposed to develop a scheme for the attainment of a higher life than had as yet been possible amid the struggles and cares of a more mundane existence. The whole history of this time reads like a medieval romance; but there is a great pathos about it, when we consider that Mrs Alcott, though outwardly faithful to her husband's plans, was all the while chafing at heart against the absurdity of trying to make their narrow resources sufficient not only for the adequate

upbringing of her own children but also for the support of five enthusiasts, of whom she knew little, and for whom she cared less.

The account which Louisa Alcott gives of this experiment in 'Transcendental Wild Oats' is funny beyond description: the utter unconsciousness of all humour in the enthusiasts themselves, their lack of everyday knowledge and their fatuous reliance upon "the spirits' dictates," are touched upon with the pen of an artist, and as only an artist could do it. The chief charm of the housekeeping, from a modern and utilitarian point of view, seems to have been that very little cooking was required, and nowadays when the "domestic question" is assuming such gigantic proportions, it would be an easy way of solving it if the average John Bull would adopt the frugal *menu* of the Fruitlands *menage:*—

Breakfast.— Unleavened bread. Porridge. Water.
Dinner.— Bread. Vegetables. Water.
Supper.— Bread. Fruit. Water.

Not much luxury here! A Barmecide's banquet, indeed!

Within this "kingdom of peace" all things lovely and of good report were supposed to bloom and blossom, but whatever the dream may have been, the awakening was swift and sad. After six years of anxiety and toil the Alcott "assets" had to be sold to pay the debts of the concern, as the respon-

sibilities of it all fell upon its promoter— "the airy philosopher of Apple Slump," as Hawthorne calls him.

When the scanty crop, sown at random by the amateur farmers, was gathered in, it had to be done by the hands of Mrs Alcott and her children, as one by one the Transcendental band had fallen away. The last pathetic little harvest-home was soon accomplished, and the husband and wife were left alone— he mourning over the failure of his high hopes, and she over his bitter disappointment. He had thought to make a Paradise regained, to "tell high messages, to see white presences upon the hills, and hear the voices of the eternal gods"— and behold, it was only a dream!

But this time was never forgotten by any of them, knitting together, even more closely than before, the bonds of family love; for Mr Alcott nearly died of heartache, and only a sense of duty to wife and family enabled him at last to fight for his life against the overwhelming depression which overtook him. The ideal, which to him had been a living truth, had been rudely shattered; and though Heaven's light still remained, it was darkened for a while by clouds of debt and discouragement which wellnigh culminated in despair and death. In later years, when asked for a definition of a philosopher, Louisa Alcott replied promptly, "He is a man up in a balloon, with his family and friends holding the

ropes which confine him to earth and trying to haul him down."

Her experiences of "practical philosophy" had not been satisfactory. She had seen the futility of Utopian schemes, and with the keen shrewdness of an observant child had noticed that too often, in discussing great deeds and duties, the performance of little ones was altogether forgotten.

Henceforward she put into practice the beautiful lines of Miss A. L. Waring— another of "the glorious phalanx of old maids," as Theodore Parker calls them—

"I would not have the restless will
That hurries to and fro,
Seeking for some great thing to do,
Or secret thing to know:
I would be treated as a child,
And guided where to go."

Mrs Whitney, with true American humour and insight, goes to the root of the matter when she speaks of the Transcendental period as the time when people "tried on" ideas. "People eager after the true, the beautiful, thinking that they can lay hold of it abstractly, and forgetting that it must grow out of them,— the thing is, to rise to the real height of it." And that is just what so many failed to do, and why failure was inevitable.

Dr O.W. Holmes says of Thoreau, one of the Transcendental leaders: "A greater familiarity with ordinary men would have done him good. The

radical vice of his theory of life was that he confounded *physical* with *spiritual* remoteness from men."

The Transcendental cult was no more and no less than that of the dwellers in the Thebaid. Nature does not change with change of scene, and from them both we may learn, as Farrar so eloquently says, to "hallow, broaden, and ratify" the lessons which both alike would wish to teach "by the spirit of Him who sat at the banquets alike of the publican and the Pharisee, who took the little children in His arms and blessed them, who beautified with His presence and first miracle the humble marriage-feast of Cana in Galilee. Whatever ideals pass away, that one remains in its unchangeable applicability, in its infinite and eternal beauty."

Although Emerson was pre-eminently the Transcendental leader, it is remarkable that he never encouraged the "cranks" of his disciples, and lived as sane a life as any one. As has been said, "He never let go the string of his balloon. He never threw over his ballast of common-sense so as to rise above an atmosphere in which a rational being could breathe."

Still more remarkable, it appears to us, is the fact that, in spite of his poetic nature, he found European cities, with all their wealth of antiquity and interest, "poor, grey, and shabby." It seems as if in him the dominant spirit of the New World

was so accentuated that freshness and futurity *alone* had any real charm, and all things beautiful had of necessity to be bright, before they could appeal to his imagination.

We have dwelt thus much upon the Transcendental period because of the influence which it had upon all the Alcott family, and which more or less affected their whole lives.

Mr Alcott next took up a Socratic fashion of lecturing, called "Conversations"; but though many people came, drawn by the charm of the lecturer, the price of admission was too low for much gain to have accrued to the family coffers, and the children early began to assist in councils as to ways and means. One of Louisa's entries in her diary of 1850 runs as follows: "I think mother is a very true, good woman, and my dream is to have a lovely quiet home for her, with no debts or troubles to burden her. But I'm afraid she will be in heaven before I can do it."

In 1852 her dream began to come true, for her first story, 'Flower Fables,' was printed, and five dollars paid for it. This "firstborn," as she calls it, was written for Ellen Emerson, when she herself was only sixteen, and its success was a great encouragement. Henceforward she lived, as she says, "a most dramatic life— never knowing what would come next." She tried sewing, teaching, and writing, conscientiously striving to do that by which she

could earn most, without regard to her own personal inclinations.

"Hope and keep busy" was one of her mother's well-worn mottoes, and Louisa seems to have steadily acted up to it.

In 1858 her first great sorrow fell upon her in the loss of Beth— her refuge in all moods, of whom she writes so lovingly in 'Little Women.' After two years of suffering— sweet and patient always— the life of the gentle sister who had been so much to the impulsive and high-spirited prototype of "Jo" passed visibly away "as in a light mist." It was no trick of the imagination, for the doctor who was present confirmed the testimony of the watching family. It is worth noticing as a phenomenon, but seems to us a sort of parable of blessing, a visible drawing up— as of a dewdrop— into the warmth and sunlight of heaven.

These were stirring times. Slavery had not been abolished, and the tragedy of Harper's Ferry was yet to be enacted. One of her earliest recollections was of a "contraband" slave whom her mother had hidden in the oven; and the execution of John Brown in December 1859 awoke all the chivalry in her nature. At a meeting in Concord, Emerson, Thoreau, and Mr Alcott took part, and his martyrdom was naturally denounced with all the reverent and admiring eloquence which they could command.

The raid of John Brown upon Harper's Ferry was

one of those glorious blunders which stand out ineffaceably upon the pages of American history. He was the embodiment of the slave confederacy, and gave his life and the lives of his sons, freely and gladly, for the negroes of Virginia.

He had chosen Harper's Ferry because there were mountains all about it, and he knew every turn of them, and hoped to hide himself and the liberated slaves in their fastnesses— but it was not to be. He and his handful of men were no match for the soldiers of Charlestown, and the bloody conflict, though sharp, was short. He led a forlorn hope and failed to realise it, but as "the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church," so his blood and that of his followers was more eloquent than aught else could have been, and freedom now reigns throughout the length and breadth of the United States. He was taken prisoner, and for forty-two days he lay wounded and sick unto death. On the 2nd of December they took him out "to be hanged by the neck till he was dead," and about 1500 soldiers were stretched over fifteen miles of country to prevent any possibility of rescue. The place of execution was half a mile from the jail, and thither he was driven in a waggon drawn by two white horses.

"This is a lovely country; I have not seen it before," said the old man calmly. The jailer could hardly answer him, so surprised was he to see John