

A NEW NOVEL

By the Author of "LITTLE WOMEN."

ALCOTT FAMILY COLLECTION

Kent Bicknell  
April 2023



## A STORY OF EXPERIENCE.

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BOSTON.

[OVER.]

# The Ticknor Society



## *The Ticknor Society Awards its 2023 Book and Book Culture Collecting Prize*

### **Kent Bicknell accepts the 2023 Collecting Prize**



Kent (left) with Ticknor Society president Drew Griffin at the Boston International Antiquarian Book Fair

On Saturday, October 28, the Ticknor Society announced the winner of the 2023 Book and Book Culture Collecting Prize: Kent Bicknell for his entry, "An Alcott Family Collection." Through over thirty years of collecting, Kent has assembled an incredible group of primary and secondary source materials related to the Transcendentalists and Transcendental thought, which share many common tenets with the progressive independent school he helped found and directed for more than forty years in New Hampshire. From that larger collection, Kent chose to focus his entry on art, letters, and family copies of books that reveal the ties that connect the Alcott family to each other, to the larger community of the 19th century, and to our own lives today.

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## **An Alcott Family Collection. Part 1. Essay**

Kent Bicknell 2023.04.15

The Alcott Family Collection featured in this catalogue is built around a multi-dimensional 19<sup>th</sup> century family: A. Bronson and Abigail Alcott, and their dynamic daughters, Anna, Louisa, Elizabeth, and May. For the past 32 years their diverse personalities and alternative approaches to life have provided inspiration in my own journey. I found, more and more, that most of what my friends and I considered “trailblazing lifestyles of the 60s” had been mapped before by the Alcotts and their friends: Henry Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, Ralph Waldo Emerson and others. The shared experiences, particularly around how to navigate the often-turbulent waters of life, continue to provide valuable lessons today.

Since my early years I have been passionate about collecting, especially artifacts that bring the presence of the past into the present. In short, I love “literary sleuthing.” When research reveals fresh facts, or helps connect old ones in different ways, the results are rewarding. Seeing information you uncovered woven into a new biography or a professional article encourages you to keep digging. Immersion in the past can help reinforce life choices as nourishment and inspiration flow from an understanding that one is not alone in alternative ways of thinking and living. Finding connections with the past underscores how we all are interconnected, and have been over the centuries.

My father was a history instructor and my mother an elementary school teacher with a passion for antiques, which no doubt inspired my interest in vintage items with stories. I enrolled at Yale (where holding a first edition of *Don Quixote* [1605] in the Beinecke Rare Book Library provided an unforgettable experience), dropped out (it was the 60s!), hitchhiked around the country and met Karen, who became my lifelong companion, and together we found a spiritual path. I returned to Yale as a married student and graduated in 1970 as a Scholar of the House, which meant I spent senior year on a research project involving 15<sup>th</sup> century spiritual texts.

In 1973 I helped found Sant Bani School (<https://santbani.org/>) in Sanbornton, NH and was head of school for 44 years until retiring in 2017. A guiding tenet of the school came from the spiritual teacher, Sant Kirpal Singh (1894-1974) who stated, “*Each one of us is unique in their own way. There is a divine purpose behind the life of everyone who comes into the world; no one has been created for nothing. We have something to learn from everyone. This is the mystery of humility.*” As I have come to understand, this is the core of Transcendental pedagogy as well.<sup>1</sup> Along with teaching and directing a school I acquired an M.A. in Early Childhood Education and an Ed.D. in Curriculum Development. I now work part-time as Curator of Special Collections at the Gordon-Nash Library, the library of my childhood just two doors down from my home.

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<sup>1</sup> See my 2022 paper, “The Heart of Transcendental Education” found at [https://www.academia.edu/88992553/The\\_Heart\\_of\\_Transcendentalist\\_Education](https://www.academia.edu/88992553/The_Heart_of_Transcendentalist_Education)

While marriage and a growing family put collecting on pause, when my sons could drive themselves to hockey practice, the gene re-awakened. In 1991 I attended a rare book fair set in a familiar arena (without the ice) and came home with a catalogue from *The 19th Century Shop* in Baltimore. I was astounded to see Henry Longfellow's copy of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, and wondered, "Why isn't this in a museum or university?" As Hawthorne's writings had impacted me in high school, I was off and running. I called the preeminent Hawthorne collector, C. E. Frazer Clark, Jr., and developed a friendship that lasted the rest of his life. Early on he shared three rules for collecting: 1) know your author; 2) if you see something that is really good, buy it now and figure out how to pay for it later; 3) if you think it is too expensive today, wait until you see what it costs tomorrow!

Following the first rule, "know your author," I plunged into a study of Hawthorne's life and times, which naturally led me to his Concord neighbors, the Alcotts. I found so much to relate to in their family that I switched my early focus from Hawthorne to the story of the Alcott family's rich lives. Recurring themes included a love of nature, a commitment to social causes, healthy diet, dress and exercise, the exploration of broad spiritual perspectives and alternative teaching approaches. The tie-in between progressive education and the Alcotts, who well understood that every person is "unique" and that "there is something to learn from everyone," became readily apparent, and I began to gather material that was in harmony with the pedagogy of the school I directed.

Given people's tendencies to cling to the familiar, establishing a school with an alternative curriculum in the 1970s presented several ongoing challenges. It was an inspiration to find that my fellow seekers and I were travelers on a path well established by the Alcotts and other 19<sup>th</sup> century luminaries. The school community (and beyond) appreciated the articles I wrote connecting Sant Bani School's approach to that of the Transcendentalists, and the articles have been accessed hundreds of times by readers in more than 60 countries.<sup>2</sup>

"Know your author" also means keeping abreast of the continual stream of biographies and studies of the Alcotts.<sup>3</sup> In an exciting development, two new books on May Alcott Nieriker<sup>4</sup> appeared in 2022: Julia Dabbs' biographical study, *May Alcott Nieriker, Author and Advocate: Travel Writing and Transformation in the Late Nineteenth Century*, and a collection of essays, *The Forgotten Alcott: Essays on the Artistic Legacy and Literary Life of May Alcott Nieriker*, edited by Azelina Flint and Lauren Hehmeyer. Like much of the world, I first knew May Alcott as "Amy" – the youngest March sister, somewhat frivolous, who, in *Little Women*, abandons art

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://independent.academia.edu/kentbicknell> .

<sup>3</sup> For example, John Matteson's Pulitzer Prize winning *Eden's Outcast: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father* [2007] and Eve LaPlante's two books focusing on Abigail Alcott, *My Heart is Boundless: Writings of Abigail May Alcott, Louisa's Mother* [2012] and *Marmee & Louisa: The Untold Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Mother* [2012]. Since 2010, Susan Bailey's informative blog, "Louisa May Alcott Is My Passion," has been a source for all-things-Alcott (see <https://louisamayalcottismypassion.com/> ).

<sup>4</sup> Late in life May married the Swiss-German businessman, Ernest Nieriker.

for marriage. The only substantial study of May, Caroline Ticknor's 1928 biography, while still of much use, left out much of her story.

The collecting front reflected a similar lack, as in the past three decades I saw more of May's artwork offered (seven paintings) than manuscript material (three letters). That changed in 2021 when longtime collecting colleague, the late Professor Joel Myerson, alerted me to the sale of four early May Alcott letters, written to a young friend in 1861. I acquired, researched, and transcribed the letters, and then shared them with scholars on the cutting edge of Alcott research.<sup>5</sup> The excitement generated by these letters is palpable as they capture a refreshing new image of May at age 20, and I am engaged with Orchard House to make them available for Alcott scholars and fans everywhere.<sup>6</sup>

Referring to newly discovered archive material, Professor Azelina Flint wrote, "May's recovery allows us to study and write about the spaces in which we ourselves inhabit and identify as living subjects: we set out in pursuit of a life that has been lived, rather than one that has been consigned to history."<sup>7</sup> To *study and write about spaces that we ourselves inhabit* has been an essential goal of my collecting, along with sharing what I find with others. Whether it is the story of individuals – or the fabric of their families and friends – I love to dive in and discover. As Professor Tim Weiskel observed in a March 2023 presentation to the Ticknor Society, "[across the globe] we need to share each other's sense of commonality."<sup>8</sup> This is why I collect.

Provenance, bibliographic information, and contextual connections for each item may be found in the descriptions.<sup>9</sup> Accession dates range from the early 1990s (Louisa May Alcott's annotated copy of *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*) through the present (a contemporary photograph of Louisa visiting with famed American thespian, James Murdoch, taken late in the life of both).

A few highlights from the Alcott Family Catalogue are:

- a book that Bronson Alcott gave to a young student inscribed, "Nov. 5 1830 / Edward Bangs / from his friend & teacher / A. B. Alcott" – highlighting Alcott's understanding of the personal nature of education
- a copy of Henry Thoreau's *The Maine Woods* that belonged to Abigail Alcott (Marmee) – underscoring the close relation of Thoreau and the Alcott family

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<sup>5</sup> Including Professor Megan Marshall, Professor Julia Dabbs, Professor Azelina Flint, Professor Marlowe Daly-Galeano, and the Director of Orchard House, Jan Turnquist.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Turnquist and I are planning a Summer 2023 inaugural presentation of the letters followed by their publication.

<sup>7</sup> Azelina Flint in *The Forgotten Alcott: Essays on the Artistic Legacy and Literary Life of May Alcott Nieriker* (2022), Introduction.

<sup>8</sup> Tim Weiskel, "The Collector's Corner," The Ticknor Society Zoom Presentation, March 21, 2023 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ffEnpr7eqzo>

<sup>9</sup> Supplemental material accompanies several individual items. For example, an inscribed book given by A. B. Alcott to his six-year-old student Edward Bangs is augmented by a letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson to the adult Bangs and the latter's copy of the Transcendental magazine, *The Dial*.

- a presentation copy of *Little Men* that Louisa May Alcott inscribed to Cynthia Thoreau, Henry's mother – particularly poignant as an important character in the story, the naturalist Mr. Hyde, was based on Thoreau
- four full letters by May Alcott with sparkling humor and rich content about the family and Concord written in 1861 – in the early days of the Civil War
- five watercolors by the accomplished May Alcott, two painted in New England and three in Europe
- James Eliot Cabot's *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson* that belonged to Louisa – carefully read and annotated by her
- the Alcott family copy of *A Masque of Poets* that includes Louisa's poem written in memory of her mother, "Transfiguration" – perhaps the copy read at Louisa's funeral

The fresh perspectives captured in items in the collection help flesh out, in Professor Flint's words, "lives that have been lived." Through their stories, the presence of the past comes into our lives and helps us understand all we share. My goal for this collection is to continue adding threads to the fabric, finding joy in the unearthing of new objects and in sharing the information generated with others. It is rewarding as well as comforting to know that the cloth I help weave will endure for generations.



**Louisa (left); Bronson (right); Abba (lower left – in her study); and Various Images of Orchard House and Hillside – Souvenir Cabinet Card circa 1885.**

## An Alcott Family Collection. Part 2 – Twenty Items with Their Stories

Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888) was a native of Wolcott, CT who did much to create himself without the benefit of a college education. As a young man he worked in a clock factory and then as a Yankee peddler who made several trips up and down the East Coast. He was an avid reader, hungry for knowledge who came to understand that his true vocation was teaching. After establishing schools in Cheshire, and then Bristol, Connecticut, in 1828 he headed north to Boston. Alcott was attracted by the sympathetic reception of Rev. Samuel J. May and his sister, Abigail (Abba) – whom he married in May of 1830. The dynamic, well-read Abba (1800-1877) had roots with the Sewalls and the Quincys, long-established prominent Massachusetts families. Her father, Col. Joseph May, as well as her brother, Rev. May, were committed Unitarians, and, steeped in those teachings, Abba became a prominent social activist as she raised four daughters.

There were four “Little Women” in the Alcott family: sisters Anna Bronson Pratt (1831-1893), Louisa May (1832-1888), Elizabeth Sewall (1835-1858) and Abigail May Nieriker (1840 –1879). Anna, the oldest (“Meg”) married John Pratt and had the two “Little Men”, Frederick and John Pratt, before John Sr. died in 1870. Louisa (“Jo”) wrote (and wrote), publishing a number of works before *Little Women* (1868) became a huge commercial success. Elizabeth (“Lizzie”) died at age 22, as in the novel, and May (“Amy”) the youngest was a free-spirited artist who studied in Boston, Paris, and London where she met and married Ernest Niereker of Switzerland. Tragically May died a few weeks after giving birth to a daughter, Lulu, who subsequently came to America to be raised by Aunt Louisa until her death in 1888, when the 8 ½ year-old returned to Europe to be raised by her father.

It is hoped the reader will come to know the family through the items connected to them in this catalogue. To void repetition, I sometimes refer to Louisa May Alcott as “Louisa,” and her father, Amos Bronson Alcott as “Bronson.” In other places, if the referent is clear, I use “Alcott” A similar approach is used with Mrs. Alcott (“Abba” or “Marmee”), Anna Bronson Alcott Pratt (“Anna”), May Alcott Nieriker (“May”), Henry David Thoreau (“Henry” or “Thoreau”) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (“Emerson” – though I could have used “Waldo” as that is what his friends called him).

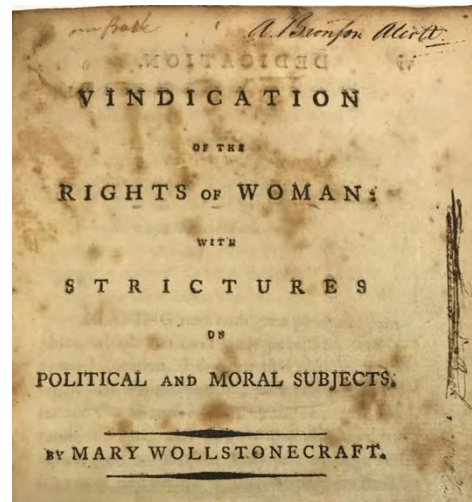
Each of the twenty items begins with a descriptive title followed by a bibliographic entry and a narrative with images to fill out the story. An occasional supplemental piece has been added using the header, “WITH.” The catalogue concludes with a short description of how one piece in particular, Louisa’s annotated copy of *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, arrived to share its story almost thirty years ago.



## 1. A. Bronson Alcott's Copy of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797). *Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. Boston. Peter Edes for Thomas & Andrews. 1792 (there was also a Philadelphia edition printed the same year). 8vo. Bound in half-leather and marbled boards similar to other books in the Alcott library. 340 pages (missing pp. 109-112). Amos Bronson Alcott's signature ("A. Bronson Alcott") in ink at the top of the first leaf of the dedication page. Pencil annotations on pp. 214-215 are similar to markings in other Alcott volumes. Without the ownership stamp of ABA's grandson, "F. Alcott Pratt," found in the vast majority of books from the Alcott library. Acquired at auction in 2017.

This powerful treatise for granting equal rights to women is one of the earliest feminist works, and the Alcotts were familiar with it. Biographer Frederick Dahlstrand wrote of Bronson, "The disparity in opportunities for education for men and women was clear to him, and he sought to promote such opportunities for women. Among his initial interests in reform literature in the 1820s was Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Accordingly, in his teaching he pledged to facilitate the "emancipation of the female mind" from "tyrant man," deploring the idea that a woman should think and believe only what her husband believed."<sup>10</sup> In January of 1879, Louisa referred to reading Wollstonecraft in her journal.<sup>11</sup>



No copy of *Vindication* had been identified in the libraries of Thoreau, Emerson or Alcott until this copy surfaced in a home in Concord, Massachusetts to be offered at auction in 2017.

### WITH

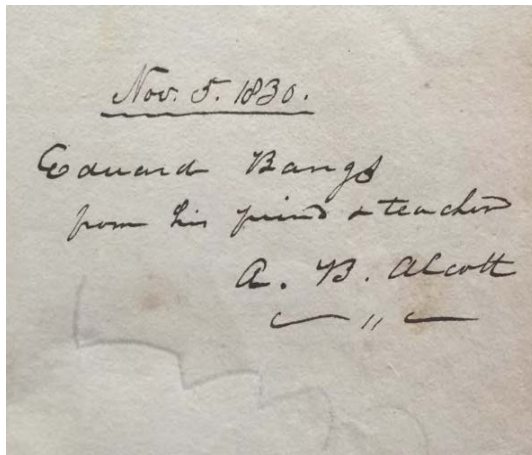
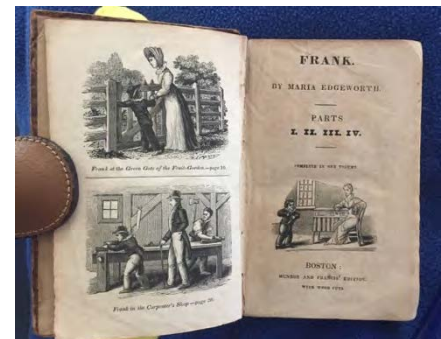
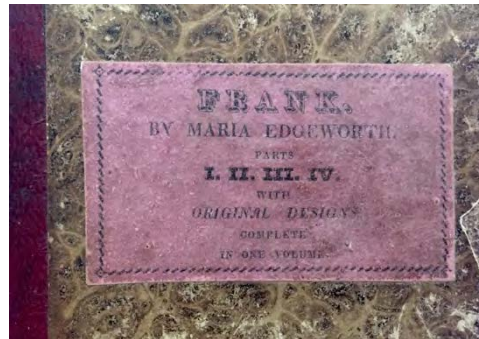
Another early book from the Alcott library in the collection is: Anonymous. *Identity of the Religions Called Druidical and Hebrew; Demonstrated from the Nature and Objects of Their Worship, and, from a careful consideration of certain customs, formerly prevalent in EGYPT, CANAAN, CARTHAGE, BABYLON, PERSIA, ARABIA, AMERICA, INDIA, GREECE, ITALY; and among the Etruscans, Bonzes, Gymnosophists, Chaldeans, &c.* London: John Nimmo, 1829. Duodecimo. Cloth boards with paper label on spine. 125 pages. This small book has the ownership stamp "F. Alcott Pratt" on the front pastedown and on the title page, and appears in Alcott's handwritten list of books in his library as of 1858. This is the kind of esoteric volume that held interest for ABA: a treatise on the shared commonalities and connections between ancient religions and cultures. Acquired in 2017 through connection made on eBay.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Dahlstrand. *Amos Bronson Alcott: An Intellectual Biography*, Rutherford. 1982, p. 338

<sup>11</sup> Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy, Editors, Madeleine Stern, Associate Editor, *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, Little Brown & Company, Boston/Toronto/London, 1989, p. 213

## 2. M. Edgeworth's *Frank* – Presented by A. Bronson Alcott to a Six-Year-Old in 1830

Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849). *Frank. Parts I. II. III. IV / With Original Designs / Complete in One Volume*. Boston. Munroe and Francis. No date (ND). 18mo. Bound in half-leather, rubbed, paper label on front cover. Illustrated with wood cuts. 233 pages. Alcott inscribed this book: "Nov. 5. 1830 / Edward Bangs / from his friend & teacher / A. B. Alcott." Maria Edgeworth was a prolific Anglo-Irish author of literature for adults and works for children. Writings like *Frank* reflected her passion that children be presented with more engaging material. Edgeworth was a favorite author of the Alcott family and this title was a staple in Bronson Alcott's schools. Acquired on eBay in 2016.



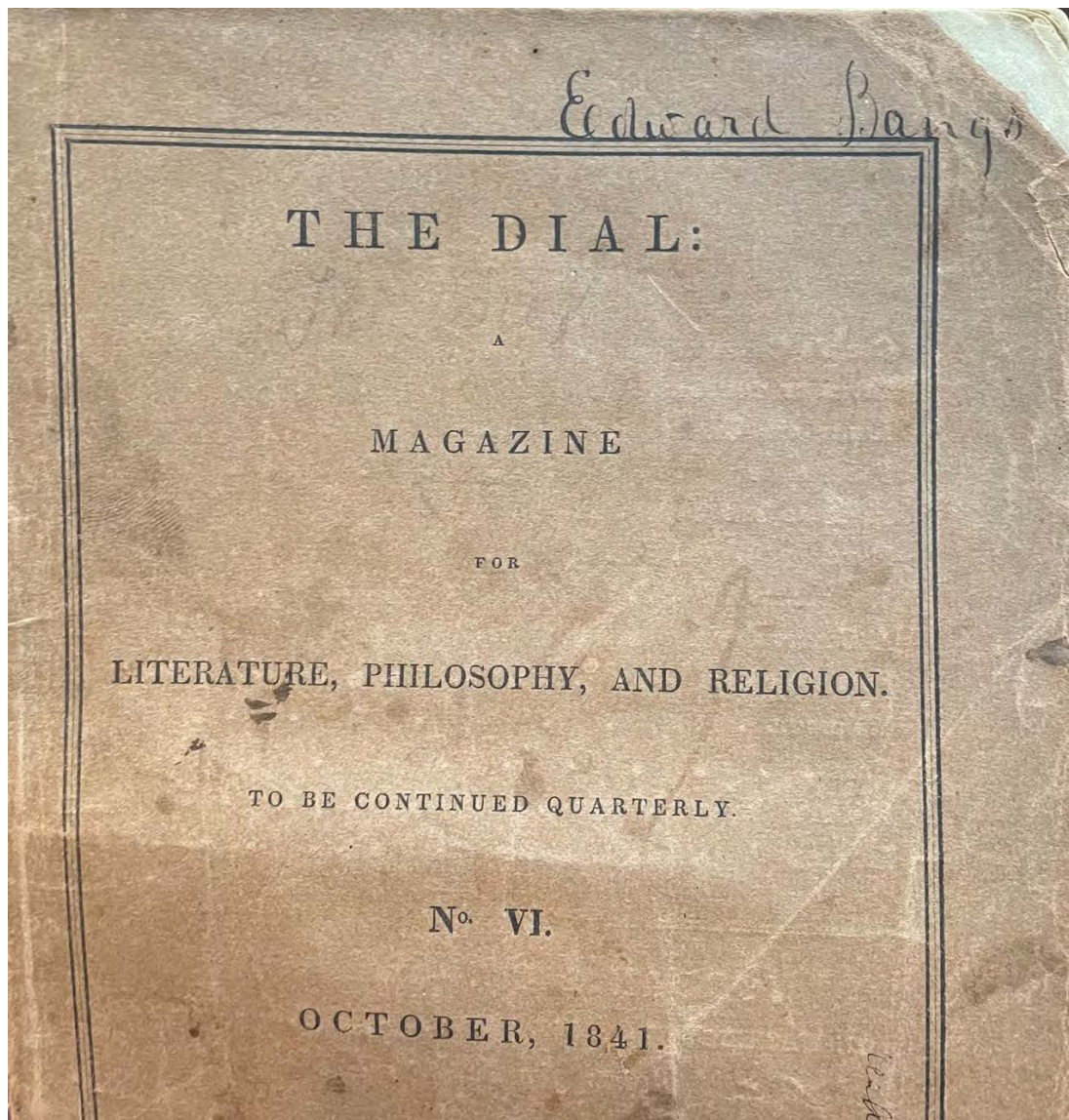
Edward Bangs (1824-1894) was one of the first ten students who enrolled in the progressive school Alcott started in Boston in 1828. Although a success, Alcott closed the school when wealthy Quakers invited him to found a school in Pennsylvania. He gave this volume of instructive stories to Edward on the day the school stopped: November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1830. On the free front endpaper Alcott wrote, "from his friend & teacher." That the 31-year-old Alcott would inscribe this to a 6-year-old as from a *friend* first and a *teacher* second is indicative of the progressive manner of relating to his students as equals.<sup>12</sup>

When Alcott returned to Boston in 1834 to open his famous Temple School, Edward Bangs was not only a pupil but somewhat of a luminary. His observations and questions are captured as

<sup>12</sup> This was heartening to read as a fellow-educator. The school I helped found and then directed for 44 years (1973-2017), Sant Bani School, operated on a guiding tenet received from Sant Kirpal Singh (1894-1974) of New Delhi, India. He stated, "Each one of us is unique in their own way. There is a divine purpose behind the life of everyone who comes into the world; no one has been created for nothing. We have something to learn from everyone. This is the mystery of humility." Like Thoreau, who understood that teachers had much to learn from students, Alcott embodied this key progressive principle.

"Edward B.," in the transcripts recorded by Elizabeth Peabody and published in the frequently maligned *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* (1836 & 1837).<sup>13</sup>

Edward Bangs went on to receive a B.A. from Harvard in 1846 and his law degree in 1849. He became an initial member of the Town & Country Club founded by Alcott in 1849, attended Alcott's public conversations, and was a minor satellite in Emerson's circle. Bangs was certainly someone Emerson was taken with as captured in references to Bangs in correspondence with Margaret Fuller. The Alcott Family Collection holds Bangs' copy of the Oct. 1841 issue of *The Dial*, the magazine of the Transcendentalists, along with a letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Bangs.



<sup>13</sup> The Alcott Family Collection holds copies of Vol. I and Vol. II of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*.

### 3. *Record of a School* – Recommended by R.W. Emerson as a Guide for Raising Children<sup>14</sup>

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (1804-1894). *Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture*. Boston. James Munroe. 1835 (first edition). 12mo. Original blue-green cloth, embossed honeycomb pattern, brown leather label, gilt lettering. 208 pages. A presentation copy from A. Bronson Alcott inscribed, “John McNair / from his friend / A. Bronson Alcott / Boston Sep. 1836”. McNair was an educator from Pennsylvania who served in the United States Congress. For the second edition, published by Russell, Shattuck & Co. in Boston in 1836, Peabody wrote a forty-page “Explanatory Preface” that she thought necessary to better understand Alcott’s overall approach.<sup>15</sup> Acquired from a rare book dealer in 2013.



Returning from Pennsylvania, where his two oldest daughters, Anna and Louisa were born, in 1834 Alcott opened another experimental school designed to help children know themselves. The Temple School was housed in the Masonic Temple on Tremont Street in downtown Boston. At the outset, the school was a radical departure from the typical New England educational experience as Alcott believed in the innate goodness of the child. His method of helping students recognize their own “goodness” relied on gentle guidance in aesthetically pleasant surroundings and a praxis built on conversations: questions and answers on a variety of topics (some of which later were viewed as too adult for mid-19th-century children). While Alcott taught, his primary assistant, Elizabeth Peabody, recorded the days and compiled her observations and notes into *The Record of a School*.

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<sup>14</sup> Emerson praised the volume to Peabody for “the pleasure & hope the Rec. of a School has given me...” and called it, “the only book of facts I ever read” that was as “engaging” as a Maria Edgeworth novel (see *Frank*, 1830 above). Emerson later recommended it to his brother, William, and sister-in-law, Susan, for use as a child-rearing manual as it was a “beautiful book... certain true & pleasant.” Cited in Megan Marshall. *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism*. Boston and New York. Houghton Mifflin Company. 2005. p. 316.

<sup>15</sup> The Alcott Family Collection has a copy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, rebound in contemporary half-leather over marbled boards.

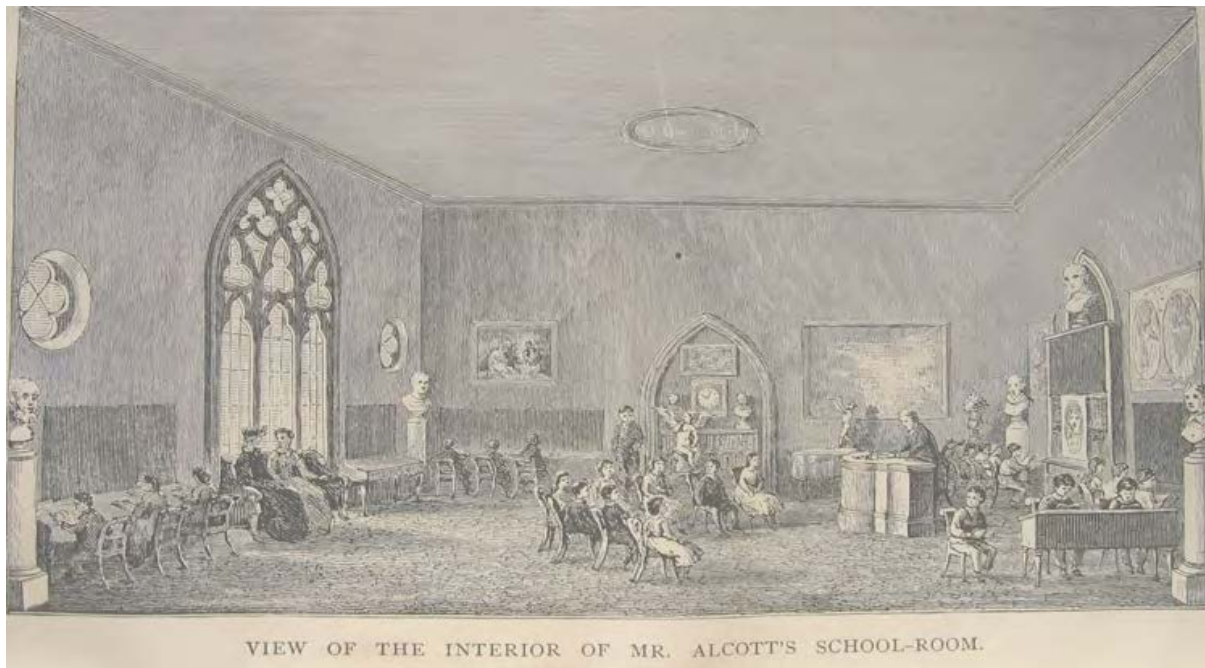
Pulitzer Prize winning biographer Professor Megan Marshall calls the book “a manifesto” that:

*lay the groundwork of Transcendentalist spirituality: to prove, as Emerson succinctly phrased it, ‘we are born believing.’ This notion was radical, even dangerous, at a time when most New Englanders still accepted the Calvinist doctrine of innate depravity – ‘we are born sinners’ – and looked to their church leaders to set the terms of belief.*<sup>16</sup>

*Record of a School* laid out a plan for how a Transcendental world view could be implemented in the classroom. Alcott was the inspiration and primary instructor, and others came in to teach special lessons, for example in drawing and world languages. Sophia Peabody (later Hawthorne) and Margaret Fuller assisted in the classroom as well.

#### 4. A Contemporary (1839) Account of the Temple School

Samuel G. Goodrich (1793-1860), Editor. “About Mr. Alcott’s School.” In the children’s quarterly periodical, *Parley’s Magazine*. New York, Charles S. Francis and Boston, Joseph H. Francis. October, 1839 (Vol. VII, Part XXVIII). 8vo (untrimmed). Sewn with yellow paper covers and illustrated with many woodcuts. Pages 131-132. Acquired from a rare book dealer in 1997.



*Parley’s Magazine*, a popular children’s magazine of the day, offered young readers and their parents a snapshot of the Temple School with its carpeted floors, decorated walls, and comfortable chairs and sofas — a welcome contrast to the austere setting that was the norm. The editor observed how the children, boys and girls ages 5 to 12, were very happy there as they “love the school room as well as they do their own homes.” Not only did they study the

<sup>16</sup> Megan Marshall. *The Peabody Sisters*. p. 314.

standard curriculum, but they were “taught to think and reason; and to talk about their thinking, feeling and reasoning.” The editor suggested his readers experience the school for themselves, as “it is open to all visitors who choose to call.”

Alcott, with innovative techniques like teaching letters by asking students to use their bodies to form letter shapes, and geography by having them map the city – including the location of their homes – was passionate about educating the whole child. Not only were the students taught to “think and reason” but they were taught to *talk about* their own mental and emotional processes.

Caught up in the success of an educational environment that allowed children free rein to discuss a variety of topics, Alcott reasoned the general public would embrace his approach. He asked Elizabeth Peabody to prepare transcripts of the daily conversations for publication, but she warned against it, suggesting Boston was not that enlightened yet. Alcott forged ahead. When the public opened Alcott’s *Conversations on the Gospels* and discovered comments such as young Josiah Quincy’s that children are born owing to people’s “naughtiness put together to make a body for the child...” roars of outrage came from pulpit and press. Under societal pressure, parents removed their children, and when Alcott admitted a Black child, most of those who remained withdrew. Peabody was right. Boston, the “Athens of America,” was not ready to support such a progressive educational venture, so Alcott closed the school. Thirty years later, after he had completed a successful tenure as the superintendent of schools in Concord, MA, Alcott felt some vindication for his early vision when his star pupil from long ago, Josiah Quincy, remarked that the Temple School had been “the best thing attempted in modern times for a properly human culture.”<sup>17</sup>

### **5. A. Bronson Alcott’s Copy of J. M. Morgan’s *Extracts for Schools and Families***

John Minter Morgan (1782–1854), Editor. *Extracts For Schools And Families In Aid Of Moral And Religious Training*. London. Darton and Harvey. 1839. 8vo. Bound in embossed green cloth boards with a paper label on the spine. 428 pages (missing pp. 275-278). Ink signature of “A. Bronson Alcott” on the title page. Acquired at auction in 1995.

As difficult as it was to close the Temple School, Alcott was delighted to hear that a group of British social activists founded a center, Alcott House, based on his writings. The reformers invited him to visit, and with Emerson paying his passage, he sailed to London on May 8, 1842.

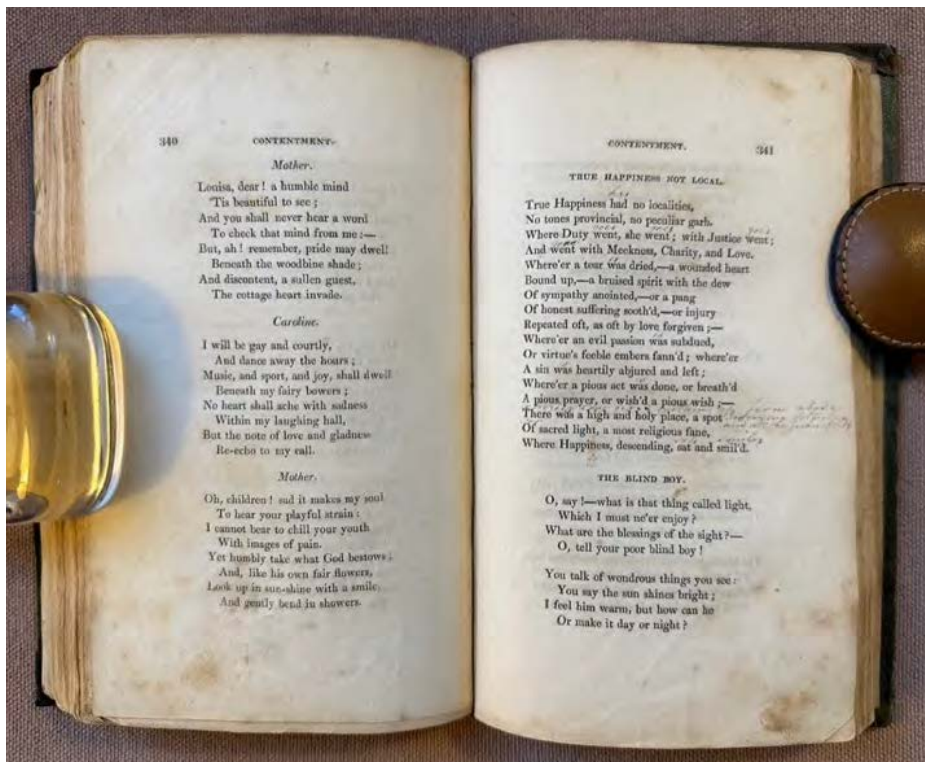
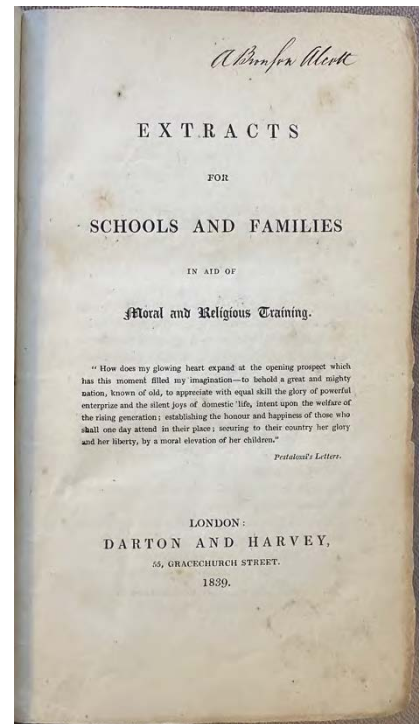
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<sup>17</sup> Frederick C. Dahlstrand, *Amos Bronson Alcott: An Intellectual Biography*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Rutherford, 1982, p. 258. Quincy wrote this to Ralph Waldo Emerson after reading Superintendent Bronson Alcott’s *Concord School Report for 1861*, a copy of which is in the Alcott Family Collection. As noted above, the Alcott Family Collection has firsts of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels: Conducted and Edited by A. Bronson Alcott*, Vol. I, 1836 and Vol. II, 1837, James Monroe & Company, Boston. A third volume, advertised as “in progress” to appear in the fall of 1837, never came to pass, no doubt owing to its controversial content and the fact that many remaindered copies were sold as pulp to line steamer trunks. The illustration of the interior of Alcott’s classroom above is from the first page of both volumes.

On July 21 he visited John Minter Morgan, an educator involved in many social movements.<sup>18</sup> It is likely he acquired this title during the visit.

*Extracts for Schools* is filled with gems of non-violence, reflective of the teachings of the Quakers and the Swiss humanitarian and educator, Johan Pestalozzi (1746-1827), whose influence on Alcott was great. See “Characteristics of the Hindoos” p. 87 and “Fishing” and “A Worm” on p. 95 for examples of reverence for life in all its forms.

The poem “A Honey-Bird” on p. 46 likens a bird to the speaker’s own “Louisa” or “Sweet Lou,” who, “*Looking into every heart / For its brighter, better part. / Like this bird, she often may / Find the moral honey lay / Hid in poor and common places / Amid homely dress and faces.*” Not surprisingly, this “Alcottian” poem is double dog-eared at the bottom of the page. The poem, “The Children’s Choice,” also dog-eared, features four children (one named “Louisa”) in dialogue with their mother (pp. 338-340).



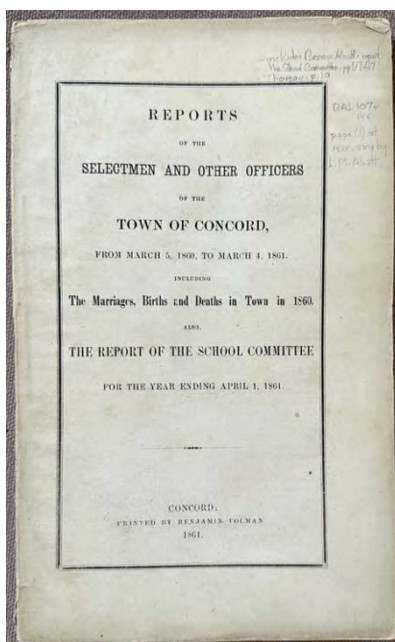
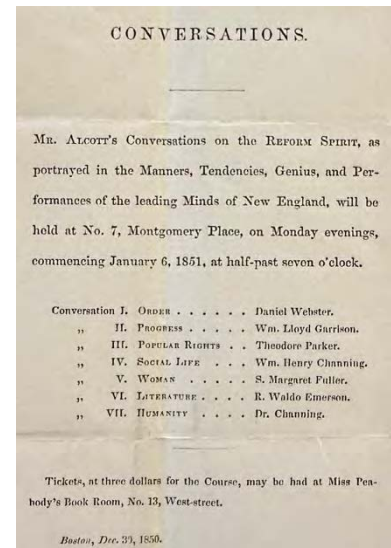
One complete poem, the didactic “True Happiness Not Local,” (p. 341) has been edited to bring it into the present – perhaps for recitation: “*True happiness had has no localities, / No tones provincial, no peculiar garb. / Where Duty went goes, she went goes; with Justice went goes; And went goes with Meekness, Charity, and Love.*” There is every reason to suspect this book was well used by members of the Alcott family.

<sup>18</sup> Odell Shephard. *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*. Boston. Little, Brown and Company, Boston. 1938. p. 165.

## 6. Ephemera Showing A. Bronson Alcott's Evolution as an Educator

Four pieces that track Alcott's growth as a well-respected educator including: a flyer for a program of "Conversations" in 1851; Alcott's 1861 report as Superintendent of Schools in Concord, MA; a ticket for a series of "Conversations and Discourses" in 1873-74; and brochures for the 1882 and 1883 summer programs at the Concord Summer School of Philosophy.

1851 Flyer: "Conversations on the Reform Spirit." Printed on one half of a folded sheet of paper 7 by 8¾ in. An announcement for a series of presentations on the "Manners, Tendencies, Genius and Performances of the leading Minds of New England." Subjects included: Daniel Webster (Order); William Lloyd Garrison (Progress); Theodore Parker (Popular Rights); William Henry Channing (Social Life); S. Margaret Fuller (Woman); R. Waldo Emerson (Literature); and Dr. William Ellery Channing (Humanity). As popularized by Alcott and Margaret Fuller, the milieu was conversational – and the audience was expected to engage with the speaker. Tickets at \$3 for the series were available at Miss Elizabeth Peabody's Book Room, No. 13 West Street, Boston. This copy belonged to the Unitarian minister, Samuel K. Lothrop, with his ownership signature on the verso.



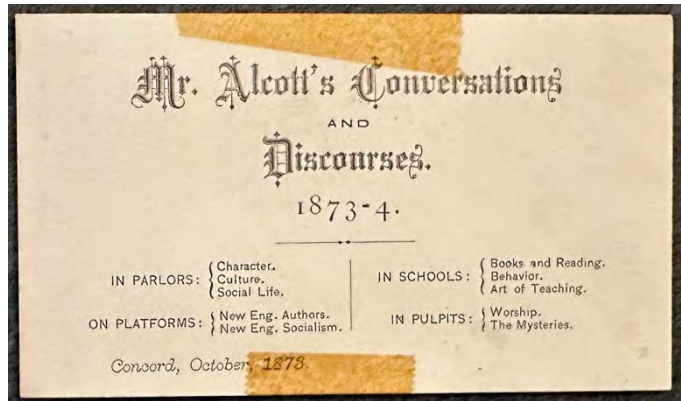
1861 *Reports of the School Committee, and Superintendent of the Schools, of the Town of Concord, Mass., with a Notice of an Exhibition of the Schools, in the Town Hall, on Saturday, March 16, 1861.* Concord: Printed by Benjamin Tolman. 1861. Octavo. Printed wrapper. Alcott's report, pp. 1-67. As noted by the school committee, "Since the new organization of the committee, three years ago, the town has had the services of a Superintendent of schools, whose zeal, ability and devotion have proved his eminent fitness for the office. He has brought to his work extraordinary endowments and long experience... He has worked, too, not only for the town, but for the state and the world; For his annual reports, widely circulated and received with appreciation, have done much to advance true ideas of education in other towns, and throughout the land."<sup>19</sup> Includes an original Louisa May Alcott poem, "March, march, mothers and grand-mamas!" to be sung by schoolchildren to the tune of, "All the Blue Bonnets Are Over the Border." Acquired from a book dealer in the US in 2019.

<sup>19</sup> From *Reports of the School Committee, and Superintendent of the Schools, of the Town of Concord, Mass., with a Notice of an Exhibition of the Schools, in the Town Hall, on Saturday, March 15, 1862.* Concord. Benjamin Tolman. 1862. p. 8.



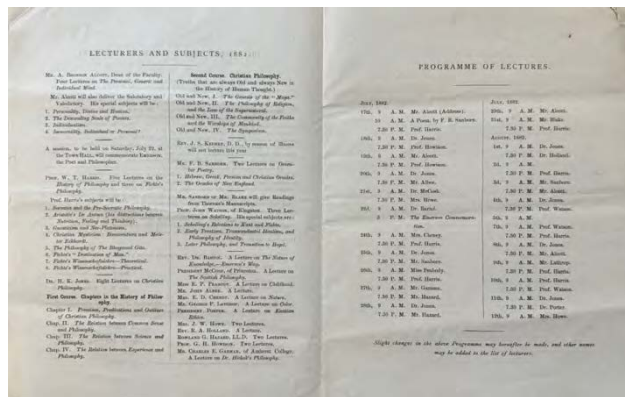
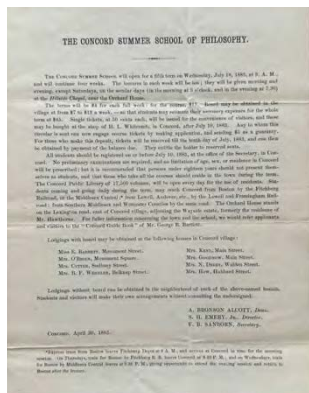
1873-74 Ticket: "Mr. Alcott's Conversations and Discourse. 1873-4." Printed on the recto of heavy card stock, 2½ by 4 in. The discourses are grouped thematically on the card: "IN PARLORS: Character. Culture. Social Life. ON PLATFORMS: New Eng. Authors. New Eng. Socialism. IN SCHOOLS: Books and Reading. Behavior. Art of Teaching. IN PULPITS: Worship. The Mysteries."

Alcott was particularly pleased with the design of the card and distributed it widely. As he wrote to a friend, "The printer has set my topics in such winning types, that I cannot well resist sending you a sample."<sup>20</sup> This writer acquired



Odell Shepard's own copy of his Pulitzer Prize winning biography, *Pedlar's Progress: The Life of Bronson Alcott* (1937) and found this ticket tucked into the middle of the book.

1882 & 1883 Programs: Two programs from A. Bronson Alcott's "Concord Summer School of Philosophy." Printed on both sides of a folded sheet of paper 10 by 16 in. Alcott's crowning success came as the founder and director of the Concord School of Philosophy (1879-1888). This "summer school" for adult learners attracted a wide range of artists, philosophers, authors, educators and social activists from across the country (occasionally the world) and was so popular that a special small building, Hillhouse, was constructed next to Orchard House. Each program outlines the various offerings over the three-week sessions from mid-July to mid-August. Topics included aesthetics, philosophy, psychology, spirituality, ethics, literature, education and reminiscences of Thoreau and Emerson as presented by an array of speakers including William James, F.B. Sanborn, Elizabeth Peabody, Julian Hawthorne, Ednah Dow Cheney, Dr. William T. Harris, Julia Ward Howe, and David Wasson among others. Sample titles include, "The Bhagavad Gita," "Milton's *Paradise Lost*," "Herbert Spencer's Causal Law of Evolution," "Space and Time Considered; Basis of Kantian Philosophy," and "A Study of Nirvana."

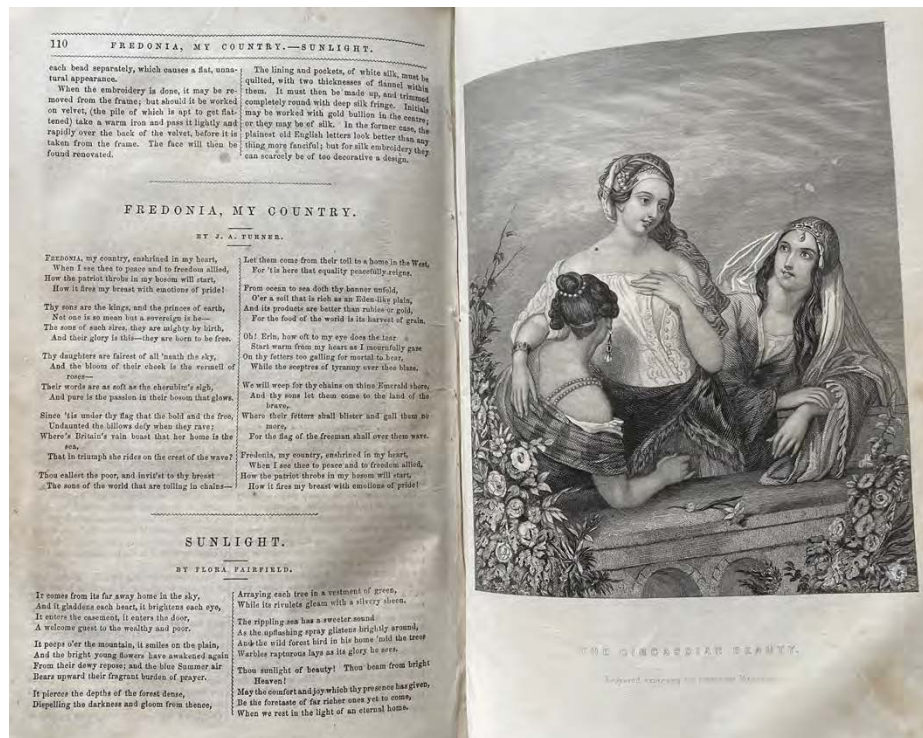


<sup>20</sup> Alcott to Ellen A. Chandler, Concord, October 1873. Richard L. Hernstadt, Editor. *The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott*. Ames. Iowa State University Press. 1969. p. 616.

## 7. Louisa May Alcott's 1<sup>st</sup> Print Appearance (1851) – and 1<sup>st</sup> Book, *Flower Fables* (1855).

Louisa May Alcott (writing as *Flora Fairfield*). The poem, "Sunlight." *Peterson's Magazine*. Philadelphia. Peterson. 1851. 4to. Bound volume in black cloth, repaired, with new spine and covers now intact. Volumes XIX and XX, complete, with hand-colored fashion plates etc. The poem is in Vol. XX, No. 1 (July), p. 110. Acquired from a rare book dealer in 2021.

In the words of early biographer Madeleine Stern, "In her own family Louisa was a heroine, for in September she thrilled to the joy of seeing her first published work. The poem "Sunlight" was signed "Flora Fairfield," but Louisa, gazing at the lines in *Peterson's Magazine*, knew that the flowery pseudonym was hers and that she had at last appeared in print."<sup>21</sup>



WITH

Louisa May Alcott. *Flower Fables*. Boston: George W. Briggs & Co. 1855. First Edition. 8vo. Bound in original blind, gilt-stamped red cloth with gilt lettering. Five b & w plates. 182 pages. Louisa's first published book was a collection of fairy tales themed around flowers, drawn from stories she told her young neighbor, Ellen Emerson. This copy was inscribed by Bronson Alcott to his nephew: "To / Edward Gaylord. / from his uncle / A. Bronson Alcott. / Boston 8 June 1855." Edward Gaylord (1827-1915) was the son of Amos Bronson Alcott's sister Pamila, and Ransom Gaylord. Acquired on eBay in 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Madeline B. Stern, *Louisa May Alcott*. Norman. University of Oklahoma Press. 1950. p. 67.

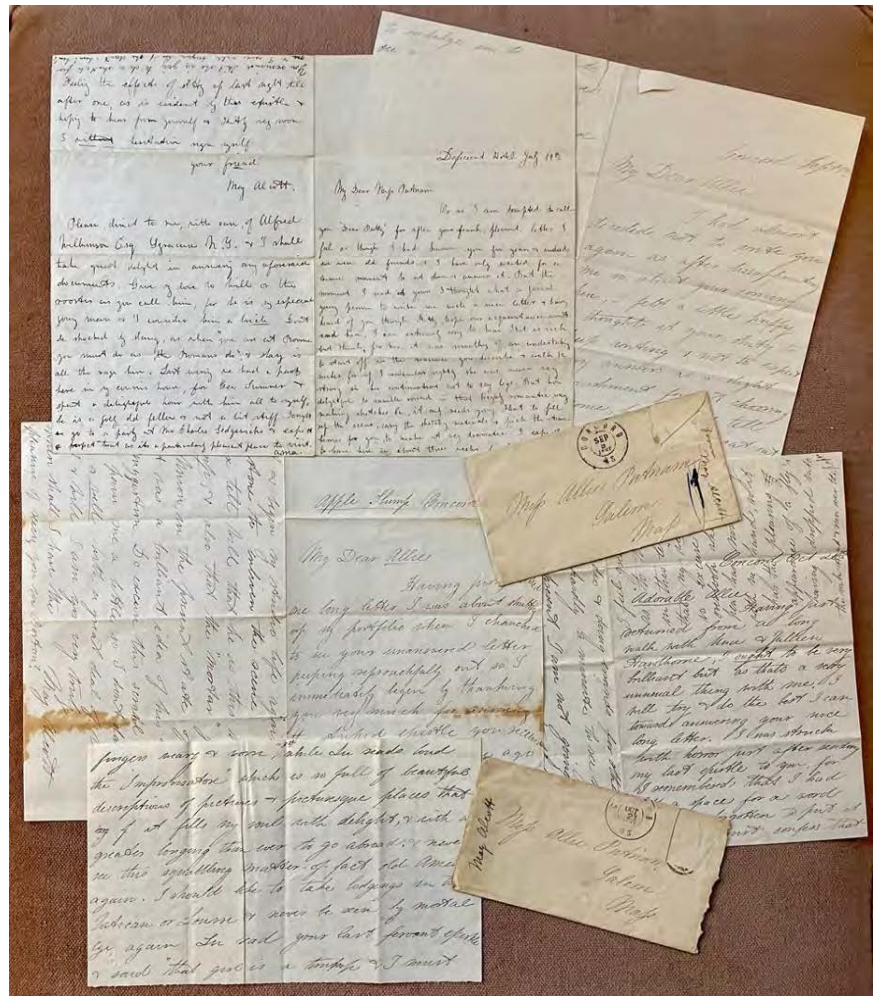
## 8. Young May Alcott Sends Four Letters, Rich in Content, to a New Friend.

**Letter #1.** “Deficient” Hotel, Syracuse, NY, July 19, 1861. Abigail May Alcott (May) to Alice L. Putnam in West Campton, NH. 4 pp. on one 8 by 10 ½ in. folded sheet.

**Letter #2.** Apple Slump, Concord, MA, August 18, 1861 – May to Alice in Bethlehem, NH. Very Fine. While Bronson Alcott called the family home, “Orchard House,” the daughters poked fun by calling it “Apple Slump.”<sup>22</sup> 4 pp. on one 8 by 10 ½ in. folded sheet.

**Letter #3.** Concord, MA, September 8, 1861. May to Alice in Salem, MA. 4 pp. on one 8 by 10 in. folded sheet.

**Letter #4.** Concord, MA, October 20, 1861. May to Alice in Salem, MA. 6 pp. on one 8 by 10 in. folded sheet and one 5 by 8 in. half-sheet, recto and verso.  
Acquired as one lot at auction in the US in 2021



The Alcott Family Collection is fortunate to have four lengthy letters written by 21-year-old May to a new epistolary friend, Alice L. Putnam.<sup>23</sup> The manuscripts capture the essence of an artist, still very much a young woman, who provides a strong voice for independence, joy, creativity and humor. The topics in the 18 pages cover a range that includes references to May’s art, training and studios, sister Louisa’s escapades and writing (seven years before she published *Little Women* in 1868), Alcott family activities in support of Union soldiers in the Civil War, and

<sup>22</sup> Also a type of dessert, e.g. an apple crisp. See <https://paperandsalt.org/2012/02/01/louisa-may-alcott-apple-slump/>

<sup>23</sup> The auction house identified Alice L. Putnam as the first cousin of Frederick Ward Putnam of Salem, MA, “widely known as the Father of American Archaeology.” <https://tinyurl.com/3sbet2u8> The author has found no reference to Alice in the many Alcott sources consulted. That she was a friend of friends is clear, and it is likely she was from Salem, MA and vacationing in northern NH, as the Alcotts did on occasion. The social circles of Concord, Boston and Salem were interconnected in the mid-1800s.

life in Concord, MA in the summer and fall of 1861 including dancing, parties and more.<sup>24</sup> While the letters are best read in full, choice excerpts follow.<sup>25</sup>

Letter #1. “Deficient” Hotel, Syracuse, NY, July 19, 1861.

*...We have a fine artist here, Carl Welsh, whose paintings are next to Church’s<sup>26</sup> in fineness of coloring & I spend a good deal of my time in his studio watching him at his easel & if his wife wasn’t always there I should have glorious times.*

*...However to change the subject, don’t you want to go to the war dreadfully? for I am wild to explore Fort Monroe & Richmond & have begun my warlike education by learning to handle a pistol & fired three balls through a window this morning, hitting a target at thirty paces which I considered quite respectable, for a green hand.*

Letter #2. Apple Slump, Concord, MA, August 18, 1861

*...My sister Louisa has just returned from Gorham NH where she has been spending a month & her descriptions have almost driven me wild, for I do enjoy scrabbling round over rocks &c in just the free & easy manner the ladies do there, going without hoops or finery & with large pea jackets on to climb Mt Washington, riding down the terrific slopes, & rocky passes, in such an exciting manner, leaping brooks & playing with bears, all of which little incidents seem somewhat novel & interesting...<sup>27</sup>*

Letter #3. Concord, MA, September 8, 1861.

*...Concord is more beautiful than ever, the leaves brighter hues & the river fuller of boats than usual as there are ever so many young surveyors here taking observations, so we have had picnics, parties, & fun generally till I am tired out & made up today for want of sleep the past week & have only been awake about three hours & it’s almost nine P.M. now, it being Sunday I thought it a good day to doze & have missed only one young gentleman’s call by so doing.*

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<sup>24</sup> “Beginning in December, 1860, May was in Syracuse, New York, where she taught an early form of art therapy at Dr. Wilbur’s Asylum (Syracuse State School), then returned home in August, 1861 to begin teaching art at the Concord school run by her father’s friend Franklin Benjamin Sanborn.”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abigail\\_May\\_Alcott\\_Nieriker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abigail_May_Alcott_Nieriker).

<sup>25</sup> With gratitude to and appreciation for the late, extraordinary scholar and friend, Joel Myerson, who alerted the writer to these letters coming up at auction in August, 2021. Images and a full transcript are available on request.

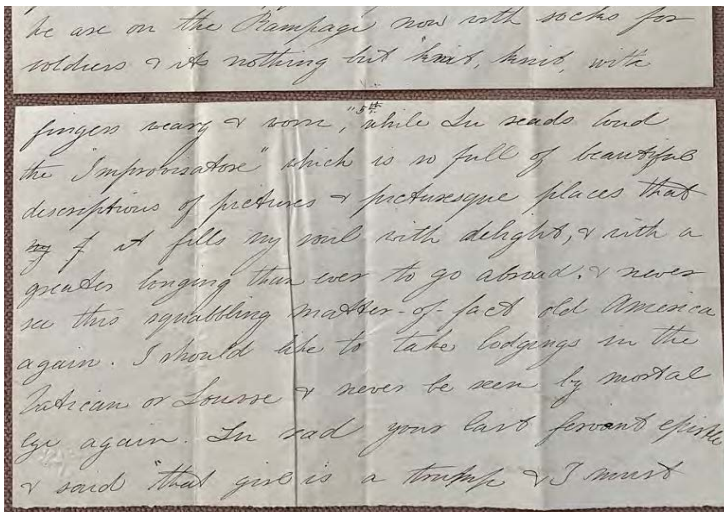
<sup>26</sup> No doubt the landscape painter Frederick Edwin Church (1826-1900) who, by 1861, was well-known for his work. Carl Welsh is unidentified as of the writing of this catalogue.

<sup>27</sup> Louisa published an extensive account of her visit to the White Mountains that was masterfully recovered by Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy. See “Louisa May Alcott on Vacation: Four Uncollected Letters,” *Resources for American Literary Study*, Spring and Autumn 1984, Vol. 14, No. 1/2, Special Women Writers Issue (Spring and Autumn 1984), pp. 113-141. Published by: Penn State University Press.

...Louisa pops her head out of her ink-stand, to send her compliments & say how sorry she is, not to see Miss Putnam in Concord.<sup>28</sup>

Letter #4. Concord, MA, October 20, 1861.

Having just returned from a long walk with Una & Julien Hawthorne, I ought to be very brilliant but as that's a very unusual thing with me, I will try & do the best I can toward answering your nice long letter... "Great Expectations"<sup>29</sup> is a brick, but Pip is a perfect pig, to express myself freely, for I know my slang won't shock you, altho I have never said two words to you in my life.<sup>30</sup>



We are on the Rampage now with socks for soldiers & it's nothing but "knit, knit," with fingers weary and sore, while Lu [Louisa] reads aloud the "Improvisatore"<sup>31</sup> which is so full of beautiful descriptions of pictures & picturesque places that it fills my soul with delight, & with a greater longing than ever to go abroad, & never see this squabbling matter-of-fact old America again. I should like to take lodgings in the Vatican or Louvre & never be seen by mortal eye again. I read your last fervent epistle & said "that girl is a trumper & I must

Lu read your last fervent epistle & said "that girl is a trumper & I must answer this letter," for your expressions "on a rampage" &c took with her immediately & if she wasn't driven now, getting ready to go to town tomorrow, she would drop you a line & make up for my stupidity.

I have been engaged in painting leaves desperately for some time & have so far succeeded as to deceive the "great Sanborn"<sup>32</sup> who attempted to pick up a stem that was only painted with a deep shadow underneath it.

<sup>28</sup> By 1861 Louisa had published about two dozen articles, including her first book, *Flower Fables* (1855 – see above), several pseudonymous pot-boilers, and a literary piece for *The Atlantic Monthly*. The Alcott Family Collection holds several of her gothic thrillers that appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.

<sup>29</sup> The Alcott sisters were great fans of Charles Dickens.

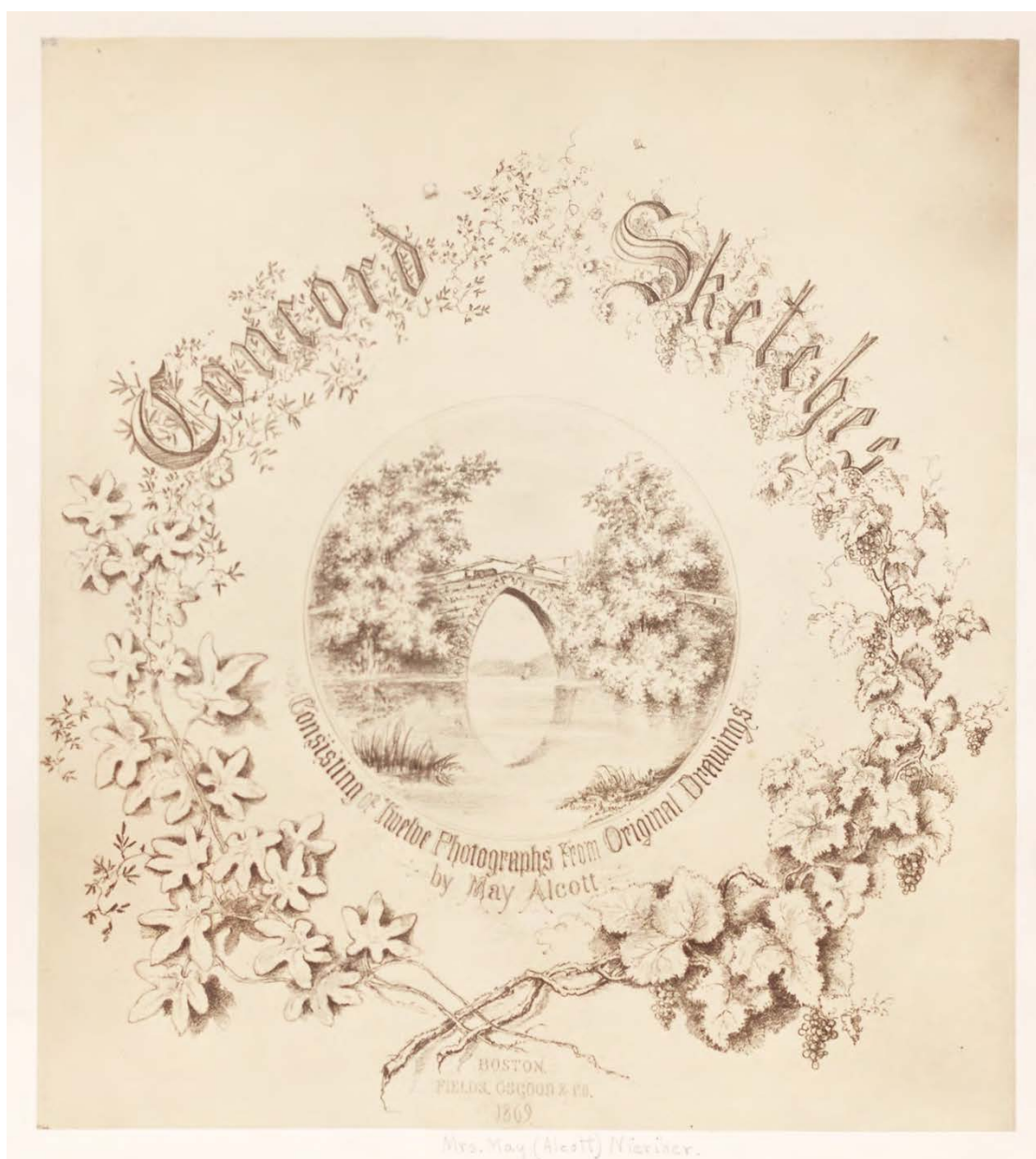
<sup>30</sup> This comment indicates that May and Alice had yet to meet in person.

<sup>31</sup> *Improvisatore* is an 1835 work by Hans Christian Andersen.

<sup>32</sup> Concord resident, Franklin B. Sanborn (1831-1917), a younger friend of the Transcendentalists (and some-time chronicler of the era) ran a small private school in Concord where the Alcott girls performed theatricals and students included the Emerson children and Julian Hawthorne. (See [https://concordlibrary.org/special-collections/antislavery/06\\_essay](https://concordlibrary.org/special-collections/antislavery/06_essay)).

**9. Concord Sketches – A “Coffee Table” Book Showcasing Original Drawings by May Alcott of Literary Spots in Concord.**

May Alcott Nieriker (1840-1879). *Concord Sketches. Consisting of Twelve Photographs from Original Drawings by May Alcott.* Boston. Fields, Osgood & Co. 1869. Large 4to (11 by 13½ in.) in the publisher’s green cloth. Fraying at corners and minor wear on spine ends. The 34-page book weighs over four pounds. Thirteen mounted photographs (including the title page) of drawings by May Alcott of Concord literary sites, divided into sections: Hawthorne / Emerson / Thoreau / Alcott / Concord River. Edited by Louisa May Alcott who wrote the brief preface and captions. An expensive book to produce, the 160 copies printed were priced at \$10 each. Acquired from a rare book dealer in the US in 2023.



This charming “coffee table” book was produced to be viewed. The well-executed drawings capture the spirit of the rural setting and convey a sense of energy within the tranquil scenes. In the short preface, Louisa wrote, "These sketches, from a student's portfolio, claim no merit as works of art, but are only valuable as souvenirs, which owe their chief charm to the associations that surround them, rather than to any success in the execution of a labor of love, prompted by the natural desire to do honor to one's birthplace" Some read Louisa’s words in the short preface as harsh and hurtful; others have noted that May and Louisa worked together on all aspects of the book, and that the effort to underplay May’s talents was a way to soften the blow of the poor reception of some of her illustrations for the first volume of *Little Women*. There is little doubt that the publication of *Concord Sketches* helped tip the balance in favor of May’s artistry.<sup>33</sup>



**Meg in Vanity Fair – May Alcott  
Illustration for *Little Women***



**A Woodlawn Gate  
from *Concord Sketches***

<sup>33</sup> See Kristi Lynn Martin’s excellent discussion in “An Ideal Life: May Alcott Nieriker, Tourism, and Life Abroad.” *The Forgotten Alcott: Essays on the Artistic Legacy and Literary Life of May Alcott Nieriker*, edited by Azelina Flint and Lauren Hehmeyer. 2022. p. 144.

In an 1840 letter to the budding Transcendentalist, Christopher Cranch, Alcott friend and neighbor, Ralph Waldo Emerson suggested the Cranch come visit to compare notes:

*If my thoughts have interested you it only shows how much they were already yours. Will you not when our fields have grown a little more invitingly green come up hither alone, & let us compare notes a little farther, to see how well our experiences tally. I will show you Walden Pond, & our Concord Poet too, Henry Thoreau.*<sup>33</sup>

The above might serve as a caption for May's delightful sketch of Walden Pond, featuring Henry ("the Concord Poet") in his boat, with his little cabin nestled in the woods above.



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<sup>33</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson to Christopher P. Cranch, Concord, March 4, 1840. In the personal collection of the author.



The image of Emerson's summer house, designed and built by Bronson Alcott, provides wonderful testament to the group's connection with nature. On October 18, 1847, Alcott recorded in his journal:

*I call this style of building the Sylvan. One merit is its simplicity. The curved rafters to the gables and the depending brackets under the cornice are original with me... [placed] as if to find the ground and take root therein. It occurred to me today that I had seen the same style in pictures of Egyptian architecture. Such things must originate in the one idea of the Infinite Beauty and fitness of the curve over the straight line in building. The highest art will employ the curve always. The serpentine is ever mystic.<sup>34</sup>*

The featured staircase was echoed decades later in the organic architecture of the Spaniard, Antoni Gaudi (1852-1926), who wrote, "Those who look for the laws of Nature as a support for their new works collaborate with the creator."<sup>35</sup>



**Gaudi - Staircase. Casa Batlló  
Barcelona 1904**



**Alcott - Summer House Stairs  
Concord 1847**

<sup>34</sup> Odell Shephard. The Journals of Bronson Alcott. Boston. Little, Brown and Company, Boston. 1938. pp. 196-97.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g. <https://magazine.artland.com/antoni-gaudi-biography-projects/>

## 10. Five Watercolors by May Alcott Nieriker Accomplished Between 1873 and 1879

Recent scholarship on May Alcott Nieriker has celebrated her accomplishments as an artist, writer, and independent woman.<sup>36</sup> While a book dedicated to her many paintings has yet to be published, it is likely this will happen in the foreseeable future.<sup>37</sup>

The Alcott Family Collection is fortunate to hold five watercolors by May, including two of her skilled “copies.” The art of copying established paintings was viewed not only as a helpful way to improve one’s mastery, but, if skilled, as a lucrative way of earning income. At this time copies were the only color reproductions available and sold well.

The five watercolors are:

1. Watercolor of an English Cottage. Signed and dated July 19, 1873. Acquired from a rare book dealer in the US in 2023.
2. Watercolor of a Rural Scene – Village in Distance (likely Conway, NH). Signed with monogram and dated July 22, 1874. Acquired on eBay in 2007.
3. Watercolor of the Tower on the Wayside – the Home of the Hawthornes. Signed and dated Aug. 1875. Acquired on eBay in 2001.
4. Watercolor Copy of Felix Ziem’s “Market Place.” Signed and inscribed, “D’apres Ziem [after Ziem].” Acquired from an art gallery in Boston in 2003.
5. Watercolor Copy of J. M. W. Turner’s “Sunset: A Fish Market on the Beach.” Unsigned and undated but provenance was the same as #4: a gift directly from the Alcotts to a neighbor. Acquired from an art gallery in Boston in 2003.

**May Alcott: “D’apre Ziem”**  
N.p. N.d.

<sup>36</sup> See these two titles published in 2022: *The Forgotten Alcott: Essays on the Artistic Legacy and Literary Life of May Alcott Nieriker*, edited by Azelina Flint and Lauren Hehmeyer; and Julia Dabbs, *May Alcott Nieriker, Author and Advocate: Travel Writing and Transformation in the Late Nineteenth Century*.

<sup>37</sup> Julia Dabbs, Distinguished Professor of Art History at the University of Minnesota, Morris, is passionate about telling – and showing – May’s story in a book featuring her artwork (personal communication with the writer).



**J. M. W. Turner "Sunset: A Fish Market on the Beach"**

**Left: Original**

**Right: Copy by May Alcott**



**Watercolor, Somewhere Near Kenilworth, UK. Signed & Dated July 19, 1873<sup>38</sup>**

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<sup>38</sup> May Alcott's unpublished manuscript at Harvard's Houghton Library, "An Artist's Holiday," has an account of a trip she took during mid-July. I am working with Alcott scholars to pin down the exact location of this painting. There appears to be an artist, replete with beret and palette, in front of the fence. See also Footnote 44 below.

**Hawthorne's Wayside Tower in 1873**



**The Tower in *Concord Sketches* 1869**



**Country Scene – Perhaps Conway, NH.<sup>39</sup> Signed with Monogram and Dated July 22, '74**

<sup>39</sup> In the summer of 1874 May spent time with Louisa and Anna in Conway, NH, so this may be an overlook of the village of Conway (or North Conway). The Conway Historical Society has invited me to present to their members to see if anyone can identify the vista.

## 11. *Studying Art Abroad: And How to Do It Cheaply* – May Alcott Nieriker’s Practical Guide for Women Hoping to Study Art in Europe

May Alcott Nieriker. *Studying Art Abroad, And How to Do it Cheaply*. Boston. Roberts Brothers. 1879. 16mo. Bound in red cloth with the title and author within ruled black lines on the front board. 87 pages. Interior pages are water stained. Ownership stamp of C. Sydney and Emily Creighton Smith of Thomaston, Maine, signed and dated by Emily, a photographer of some note,<sup>40</sup> on Nov. 14, 1882. Acquired from a rare book dealer in the UK in 2013.

May traveled to Europe three times, funded primarily by Louisa. Her first trip, accompanied by Louisa and a close family friend, Alice Bartlett, began in April of 1870. When Louisa returned to America in the spring, May remained through November studying art. Louisa later published a delightful thinly veiled account of their trip, *Shawl Straps*, which, one may hope, will someday be illustrated with May’s many drawings from the time.<sup>41</sup>

May spent nearly a year in London from April 1873 to March 1874, taking lessons and working as a copyist in the National Gallery, “with its three-hundred lovely water colors by Turner,”<sup>42</sup> while visiting, for example, Kensington, Bethnal Green, and Soames Museum. On this trip she met the famous art critic, John Ruskin, who championed J. M. W. Turner, and Ruskin is supposed to have commented on May’s superlative abilities as a copyist.<sup>43</sup> May wrote many letters home that she later fashioned, with Louisa’s help, into a manuscript, “An Artist’s Holiday.”<sup>44</sup> Inspired by her experiences abroad, May helped open an Art Center in the Masonic Hall in Concord on her return.

After 2½ years, May again sailed to Europe in what was to be her last trip. Ever evolving, her paintings began to be accepted in highly competitive, prestigious shows such as the Paris Salon. She met and befriended Mary Cassatt (1844–1926) and traveled to study in France as well as London. In March of 1878 she married a young Swiss businessman/musician, Ernest Nieriker (1855–1935) and pursued her art as they settled in France. She continued to meet with artistic

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<sup>40</sup> See <https://camdenarea.pastperfectonline.com/library/6CE27914-F695-4B94-9394-358613236196>

<sup>41</sup> Harvard’s Houghton Library and Orchard House / L.M.A. Memorial Association have many of May’s drawings. Daniel Shealy provides a rich source for this trip (and more) through his publication of the sisters’ letters home from their time in Europe. To illustrate the letters, he included over 30 of May’s sketches. See Louisa May Alcott and May Alcott. Daniel Shealy, Editor. *Little Women Abroad: The Alcott Sisters’ Letters from Europe, 1870-1871*. Athens and London. University of Georgia Press. 2008.

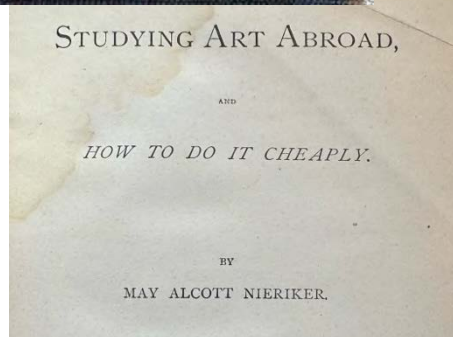
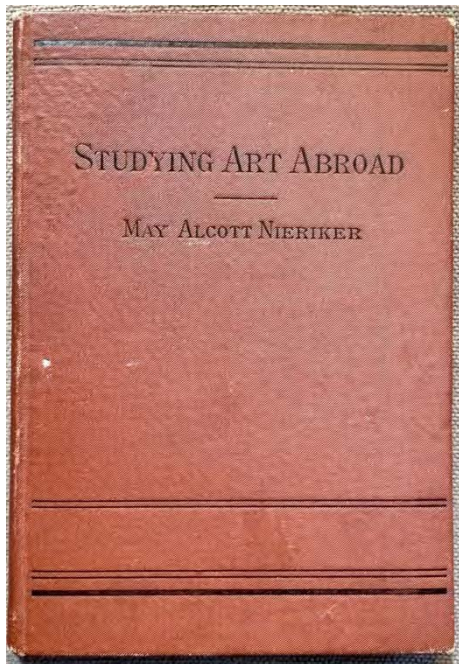
<sup>42</sup> *Studying Art Abroad*. p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g. John Matteson. “‘The Pure Hope of Giving ... Pleasure’: May Alcott, John Ruskin, and the Moral Aesthetic” in *The Forgotten Alcott: Essays on the Artistic Legacy and Literary Life of May Alcott Nieriker*. Azelina Flint and Lauren Hehmeyer, Editors. Kindle edition. 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Professor Marlowe Daly-Galeano has written at length about the manuscript and hopes to publish it soon (personal correspondence). See her “Disciplinary Conversations: May Alcott Nieriker’s ‘An Artist’s Holiday’” in *The Forgotten Alcott: Essays on the Artistic Legacy and Literary Life of May Alcott Nieriker*. Azelina Flint and Lauren Hehmeyer, Editors. Kindle edition. 2022. Portions of the manuscript are in the hand of Louisa, and it seems clear she was helping to edit the account. To view/download the manuscript, see: [https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/24/digital\\_objects/76812](https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/24/digital_objects/76812)

success and 1879 saw the birth of both *Studying Art Abroad* and her daughter, Louisa (Lulu) on November 8. Tragically May died about seven weeks after delivery, and Lulu, as May had wished, was sent to America to be raised by Louisa.<sup>45</sup>

Along with her artwork, *Studying Art Abroad* is now recognized as a lasting contribution from “the forgotten” Alcott. It is a witty, crisp, engaging manifesto intended to empower anyone, especially single women, to dare to reach for their dreams. Not only does May cover broad topics of art theory, history and criticism, but shares specific details on how to find teachers, art supply stores, salons, studios, places to stay – and even when/where to get the best bargains on clothes and other necessities. A scarce work (I have seen only two copies in the trade in over 30 years), this gem deserves every inch of its growing reputation.



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**PENSIONS.**

Mme. THIERRY, 44 Rue de Clichy. (Good room and table, 6 francs per day.)  
 Miss COOKE, 9 Avenue de Trocadéro. (Moderate prices and much frequented by English and Americans.)  
 Mme. PENSON, 3 Rue de Boulogne. (Neat, and reasonable in price.)  
 Mlle. GRAVIER, 127 Faubourg St. Honoré.  
 Mesdames GAUTIER et DALAMT, 6 Rue Castiglione.  
 Miss ELLIS, 28 Rue Bassano, and Miss ROBERTS, also Champs Elysées. (Both expensive, but exceedingly comfortable.)  
 Mrs. WOOLEY, 7 Rue Calysée. (55 francs per week.)  
 Mme. BEIM, 76 Rue Bonaparte. (8 francs per day.)  
 No. 67 Avenue de l'Alma. (Rather expensive but comfortable, and French lessons included in board.)  
 61 Avenue Friedland, Champs Elysées, and 73 Boulevard St. Germain. (Both comfortable, and not expensive.)  
 2 Rue Larribe, au coin de la Rue Constantinople.

**HOTELS.**

HOTEL DU PALAIS, 28 Cours la Reine. (Good room and table, 8 francs per day.)  
 LES TROIS PRINCES, Rue Neuve des Petits Champs. (Small private hotel, central and well kept.)  
 Small hotels, with cheap rooms, Rue de Douai.  
 M. CHEVILLON FILS, Grez, près Nemours, Seine et Narne. (6 francs per day.)

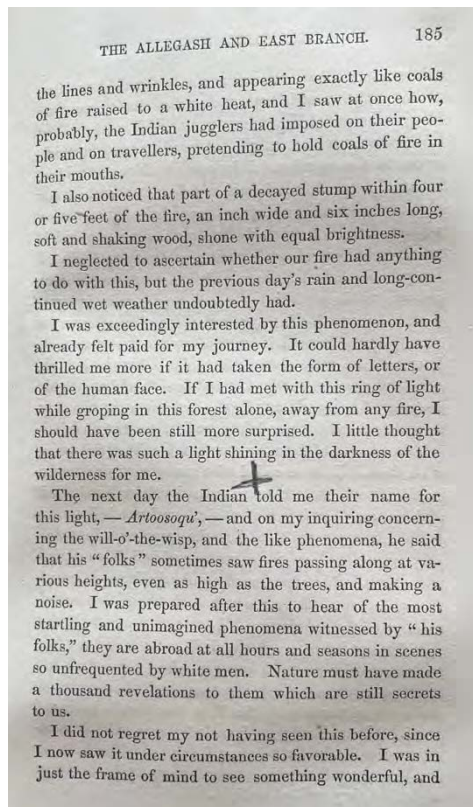
**DINAN.**

HOTEL DU COMMERCE. (Clean and comfortable.)  
 Mrs. HOBBE's pension. (35 francs per week.)  
 Mlle. COSTE's pension, Place St. Louis. (Comfortable and cheap.)

<sup>45</sup> The Alcott Family Collection holds one item in the hand of Anna Pratt, the eldest Alcott daughter. It is a card, 4¼ by 3½ in., to William Ellery Channing (1817-1901), close friend of Thoreau and Bronson Alcott. Anna writes, “Father will be absent Wed. evening & Sophie Nieriker is to have a little company. If this will interfere with the pleasure of your visit we shall be happy to see you another evening. If however you will enjoy coming tomorrow, pray feel at liberty to do so.” Sophie Nieriker, the younger sister of May’s husband, Ernest, brought Lulu to America in September of 1880 to be raised by Louisa (and Anna). Acquired on eBay in 2023.

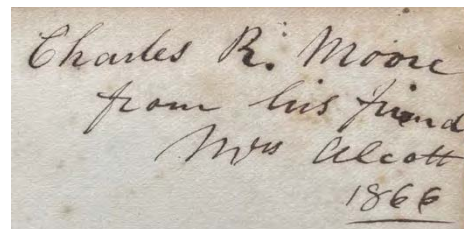
## 12. A Copy of Thoreau's *The Maine Woods* that Belonged to Abba Alcott (Marmee)

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). *The Maine Woods*. Boston. Ticknor and Fields. 1864. 8vo. Bound in green cloth with gilt lettering on spine. 328 pages. Inscribed on the front free flyleaf by Abba Alcott: "Charles R. Moore / from his friend, / Mrs. Alcott, 1866." Also signed in pencil



on front fly leaf: "C R Moore." An eradicated name on the verso of the front free endpaper appears to be that of publisher James T. Field.<sup>46</sup> A first edition of Thoreau's posthumous book about his excursions into the wilds of Maine. It is possible that Charles Moore was a relative of the Alcott's neighbor and friend, John B. Moore. from whom the Alcotts purchased Orchard House in 1857. Acquired from a rare book dealer in the US in 2021.

From March of 1840 (when the Alcotts moved to Concord) until his death in 1862, Thoreau was "in



almost daily contact" with one member of the family or another.<sup>47</sup> In 1848 Abba Alcott shared this observation of Henry: "*His experience has been a peculiar and interesting one. He may truly be called the "Diogenes" of the 19th century - so humble - true and wise - His Hut being literally a Tub with a roof - but so comfortable - rural and classic.*"<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> The Thoreau titles in the Alcott library housed at Harvard's Houghton Library include *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack* [1849] and *Walden* [1854], as well as several titles published posthumously. *Excursions* and *Cape Cod* are both inscribed by the publisher, James T. Fields, to A. Bronson Alcott. Curiously, there is no copy of *The Maine Woods* in the Alcott holdings at Harvard. On the verso of the fep of this copy is a name that was rubbed out at some point. The outline of the whole appears, to this writer, to be that of James T. Fields. Further research is required to be certain.

<sup>47</sup> "The ties between Thoreau and the Alcotts are more extensive than one might expect... From the time of the Alcott family's move to Concord, Massachusetts, in March 1840, until Thoreau's death in May 1862, he was in almost daily contact with one or another of their number. He was a frequent guest in the Alcott home, taking dinner or tea with the Alcott family. Bronson Alcott, who admired the young man's intellect, visited him regularly during the sojourn at Walden Pond and appears as a 'welcome visitor' and 'almost the only friend of human progress' in *Walden*. Thoreau was a pallbearer at the funeral of Elizabeth Alcott (the 'Beth' of *Little Women*) and a guest at the wedding of Anna Alcott ('Meg') and John Pratt. The intimacy in these events extends to Thoreau's last days, for Bronson Alcott arranged his funeral and spoke as a part of the service." Fred Erisman, "Thoreau, Alcott, and the Mythic West" in *Western American Literature*, Fall 1999, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 302-315.

<sup>48</sup> Abba Alcott to Ellie Robbins, March 1<sup>st</sup> 1848 published in "Thoreau and the Lexington Lyceum," Walter Harding, *The Thoreau Society Bulletin*, No. 161 (FALL 1982), p. 2. Diogenes of Sinope (c. 404-323 BCE) was a Greek Cynic philosopher best known for holding a lantern (or candle) to the faces of the citizens of Athens claiming he was searching for an honest man... Diogenes believed in self-control, the importance of personal excellence in one's behavior (in Greek, arete, usually translated as 'virtue'), and the rejection of all which was considered unnecessary

A decade after Thoreau's death, Bronson distilled the essence of his close friend:

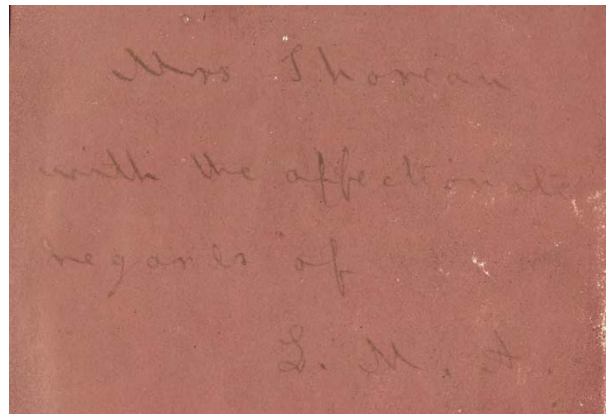
*His presence was tonic, like ice water in dog-days... welcome as the gurgle of brooks – drink and be cool! He seemed one with things, of nature's essence and core, knit of strong timbers, – like a wood and its inhabitants... He of all men seemed to be the native New-Englander, as much so as the oak, the granite ledge; our best sample of an indigenous American, untouched by the old country, unless he came down rather from Thor, the Northman, whose name he bore.*<sup>49</sup>

The Alcott daughters loved Thoreau and spent a good deal of time with him on nature walks, floating on Walden Pond and hunting for wild berries. Louisa embedded Thoreau in several of her novels, including the characters Adam Warwick in *Moods* and the naturalist, Mr. Hyde in *Little Men*. See the next item for a poignant copy of *Little Men* that Louisa inscribed to Thoreau's mother, Cynthia Thoreau.

### 13. A Presentation Copy of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Men* Inscribed to Mrs. Thoreau

Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888). *Little Men*. Boston. Roberts Brothers. 1871. 16mo. Publisher's maroon cloth, rebaked with the original spine laid down. 376 pages. First edition inscribed on the front free endpaper, "Mrs. Thoreau / with the affectionate / regards of / L.M.A." *Little Men* is the second volume of the *Little Women* trilogy. The final volume, *Jo's Boys and How They Turned Out: A Sequel to "Little Men"* was published in 1886, two years before Louisa's death. Acquired from a rare book dealer in the US in 2009.

When Louisa was visiting Rome (with May and Alice Bartlett in 1870) they received the sad news from home that Anna's husband, John Pratt, passed away unexpectedly. Louisa immediately sat down to write *Little Men* to help support her now father-less nephews. According to Alcott biographer Madeleine Sterne:



*From memory, too, she painted her characters, until Freddy and Johnny [her nephews] were again transmuted into Demi and Daisy, and John Pratt appeared once more as John Brooke, a man whose goodness would last when fame and money had failed. Dickens exerted his influence, as Louisa*

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in life such as personal possessions and social status. He was so ardent in his beliefs that he lived them very publicly in the marketplace of Athens. He took up residence in a large wine cask (some sources claim it was an abandoned bathtub), owned nothing, and seems to have lived off the charity of others. He owned a cup which served also has a bowl for food but threw it away when he saw a boy drinking water from his hands and realized one did not even need a cup to sustain oneself.

See e.g. [https://www.ancient.eu/Diogenes\\_of\\_Sinope/](https://www.ancient.eu/Diogenes_of_Sinope/) and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diogenes>

<sup>49</sup> Amos Bronson Alcott in *Concord Days* [1872], pp. 12-13.

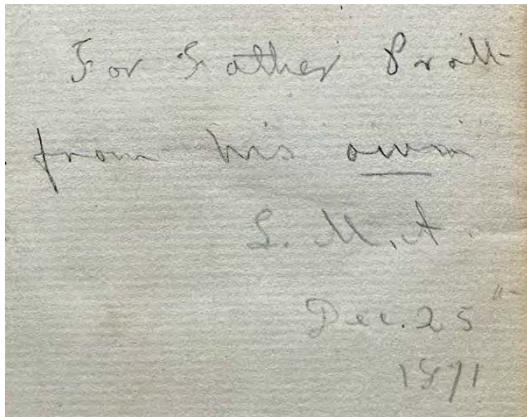


*alluded to Dr. Blimber and Mrs. Toot's wristbands, but far more than Dickens it was Mr. Thoreau who stood near her at 2 Piazza Barberini as she wrote of Mr. Hyde, who could whistle to snakes and tickle lizards, who knew when flowers would bloom and could tell tales of the Indians and the rocks.*<sup>50</sup>

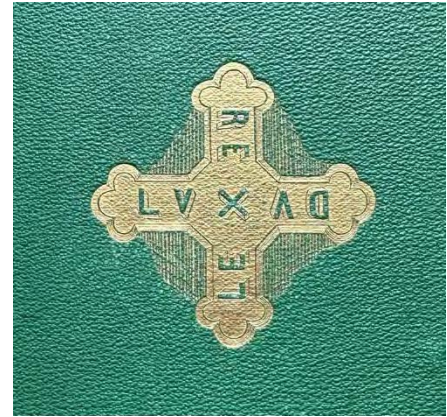
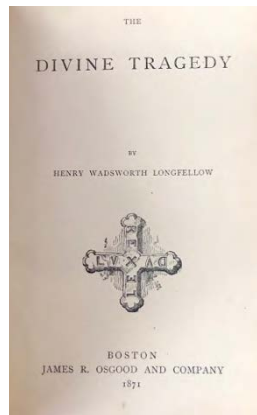
The setting for *Little Men* is Plumfield, a progressive school with a pedagogy based on the schools of Bronson Alcott. There is a poignancy to this gift as an important character in the book is modeled after Cynthia Thoreau's son, Henry. "Mr. Hyde" (a double play on words for the reclusive naturalist) is very effective at reaching a rebellious boy, Dan, with whom no one else can connect. After Dan runs away from Plumfield, Mr. Hyde, through his deep knowledge and charming ways with animals and nature, and his stories of Native Americans, touches Dan's heart and brings him back into the fold. One can imagine it would have been moving for Cynthia Thoreau to read about Mr. Hyde and the powerful impact of his gentle nature coupled with extensive knowledge and experience.

#### **14. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Divine Tragedy* – Gifted by Louisa May Alcott to "Father Pratt" – With a Shakespeare-based Rhyme Composed by Louisa**

Henry W. Longfellow (1804-1882). *The Divine Tragedy*. Boston. James R. Osgood and Company. 1871. 8vo. Publisher's green cloth, spine lettered in gilt. Ornamental device in gilt on front board; second ornamental device (blind) on rear board. 150 pages. Inscribed by Louisa May Alcott for Minot Pratt: "For Father Pratt/ from his own/ L.M.A./ Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>/ 1871." Tucked inside the volume, perhaps intended for a bookmark, was a slip of paper (1½ by 5 in.) with a verse in Alcott's distinct hand on the recto. Acquired from a book dealer in the US in 2020.

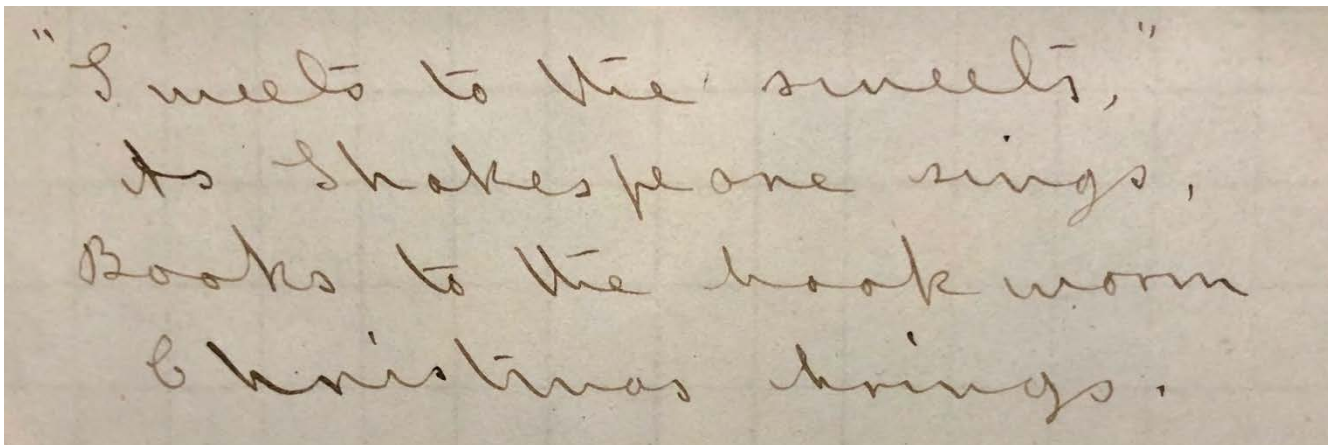


For Father Pratt  
from his own  
L.M.A.  
Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>  
1871



<sup>50</sup> Madeline B. Stern, *Louisa May Alcott*. Norman. University of Oklahoma Press. 1950. p. 215.

Minot Pratt (1805-1878) was an important figure in the utopian community, Brook Farm in West Roxbury, Massachusetts. He was one of the founders, a director, and later the head farmer. After Brook Farm dissolved (1846), the Pratts settled in Concord, Massachusetts. His son, John, enjoyed acting in amateur theatrical productions, and so met fellow actress, Anna, eldest of the four Alcott sisters. John and Ann married on May 23, 1860. When John died unexpectedly in November of 1870, Louisa undertook writing *Little Men* (see previous item) to help support Anna and her two sons (the "little men" – Fred and John). Louisa noted in her journal that her family spent Thanksgiving with the Pratt family in 1871 – about a year after John died. This copy of *the Divine Tragedy*, a retelling of the life of Christ in verse, was a Christmas gift for the elder Pratt, inscribed tenderly "For Father Pratt" from "his own L.M.A." In the middle of the book was a slip with a verse written by Louisa.



*"Sweets to the sweets," / As Shakespeare sings.  
Books to the book worm / Christmas brings.*

The quote, from *Hamlet*, was uttered by his mother, Gertrude, as she scattered flowers over the grave of Ophelia:

*Sweets to the sweet. Farewell! [scatters flowers]  
I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife.  
I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid,  
And not have strewed thy grave.*

It was a delight to find this unexpected treasure in the middle of a "divine tragedy," as Louisa's recasting of the original into the heart's desire of a true bookworm carries a warmth into the present.

## 15. Russian Edition of *Little Women* Translated, Printed, Published and Distributed by a Powerful Feminist Troika in 1876

Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888). *Little Women Pt. I*. Russian Translation. St. Petersburg. Stasovoi & Trubnikovoi. 1876. 8vo. Contemporary gilt-stamped reddish-brown cloth boards. Ownership inscription with two monogram stamps to the title page. 400 pages (missing pp. 15-16). A generally unrecorded first Russian translation of Pt. I of Alcott's *Little Women*. Acquired from a rare book dealer in Germany in 2016. The dealer, Philipp Penka, wrote, "the book came to me via a Bulgarian bookseller in Sofia, which somewhat complicates the provenance. Presumably it got to Bulgaria with the first wave of the Russian emigration after the October Revolution. Its scarcity is illustrated by the fact that even Russia holds only a single institutional copy. It is not in KVK (Karlsruhe Virtual Catalog), OCLC, the Russian State Library, or Libman (V. A. Libman's *Russian Studies of American Literature*); only the Russian National Library has a copy."<sup>51</sup>

Three figures who stood out in the 19th century Russian feminist movement were Anna Filosofova, Nadezhda Stasova, and Maria Trubnikova. Among their many activities was the establishment of a publishing company run by women. Over sixteen years (1863-1879) the *artel* translated and published "fourteen books, including children's books such as *The Tales of Hans Christian Anderson*, two short stories by Louisa May Alcott, and scientific works by Charles Darwin, among others. In all, twenty-seven women earned their living from this venture. For years after the *artel* closed, shareholders received royalties from the sale of its books."<sup>52</sup>

The two Alcott titles translated and published were *Old-Fashioned Girl* and *Little Women, Pt. I*. What makes this volume of particular interest is a three-page introduction, which expands on the connection between the radical writings of Alcott (buried in her stories) and the Russian feminist movement:

*Louisa Alcott's satirical humor so truthfully and accurately castigates the social ulcers of American life – the thirst for riches and pleasures infecting youth right off the school bench (and almost right out of diapers). On the other hand, her compositions breathe with such an honest and healthy respect towards patient daily labor that one can hear genuine notes of unfeigned patriotism and sympathy towards the better side of human nature. In our opinion the stories are capable of waking in the minds of young readers the sprouts of independence, energy and activity – all the qualities we might envy in our transatlantic friends...*<sup>53</sup>

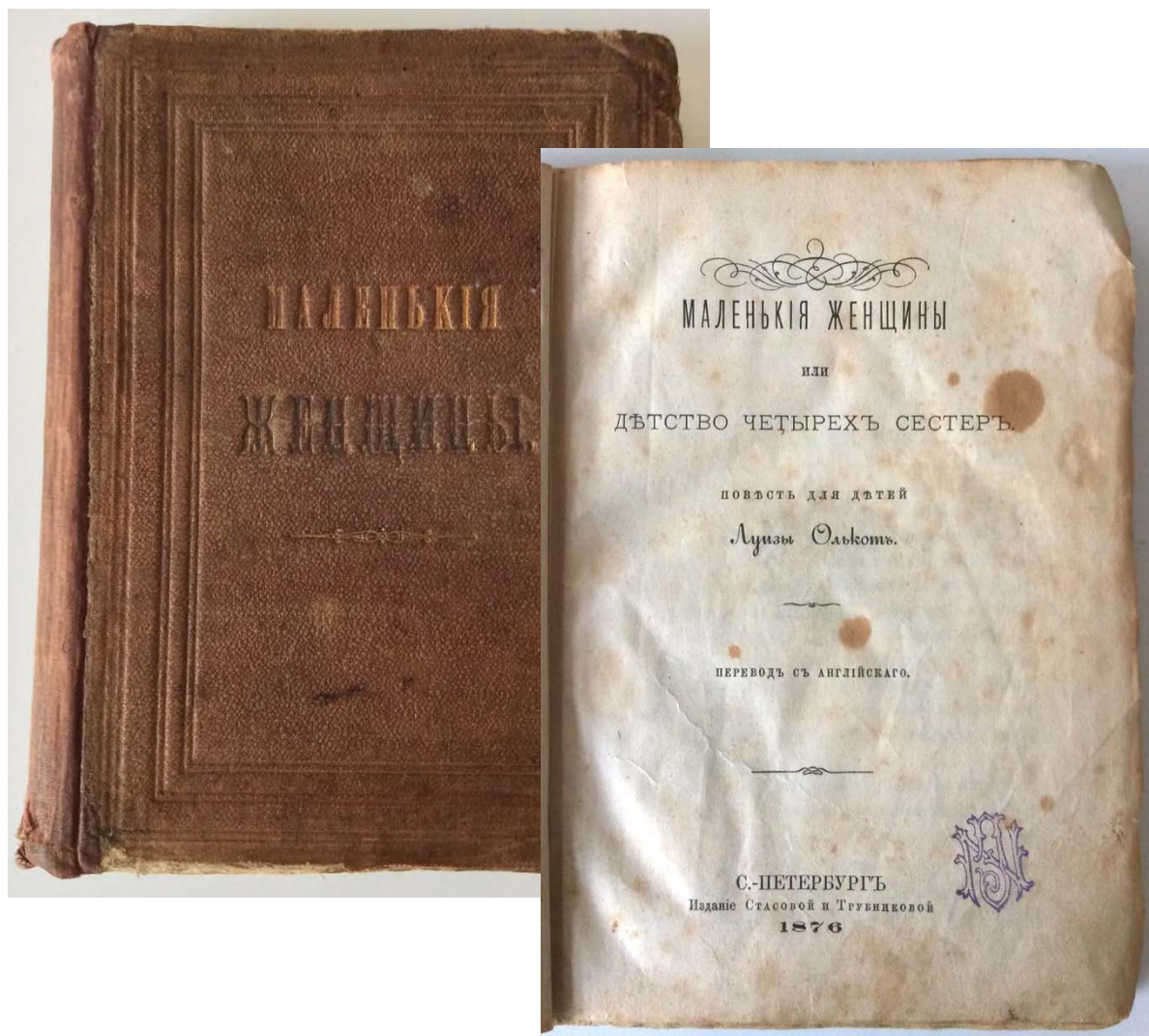
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<sup>51</sup> Phillip Penka, several emails to the writer in April of 2016. The Library of Congress lists an 1895 paper-cover edition from the same publishers. See Judith C. Ullom, Compiler. *Louisa May Alcott. – A Centennial for Little Women: An Annotated, Selected Bibliography*. Washington. 1969. pp. 29-30.

<sup>52</sup> Rochelle G. Ruthchild. "Reframing Public and Private Space in Mid-Nineteenth Century Russia: The Triumvirate of Anna Filosofova, Nadezhda Stasova, and Mariia Trubnikova." Christine Worobec, Editor. *The Human Tradition in Imperial Russia*. Kindle Edition. 2009. Locations 1253-1260.

<sup>53</sup> Translated by Sant Bani School alumna from Kazakhstan, Zhanar Seitmagzimova, on Sept 4, 2016, at the request of the writer. The book itself was translated by E. G. Beketova, grandmother of the Symbolist poet Aleksandr Blok and a member of the *artel*. Her name was not specified anywhere, and the introduction was simply signed, "The

The fact that the *artel* chose to publish *Old-Fashioned Girl* first (as noted in the first part of the introduction) had to have been by design. One of the most powerful pieces of feminist writing that Alcott accomplished was through the scene of the bohemian artists in *Old-Fashioned Girl* as they discussed what a statue of “the modern woman” should look like. These early American feminists insisted, above all, that she should have a ballot box at her feet, indicating she must have the right to vote (see also the next item).

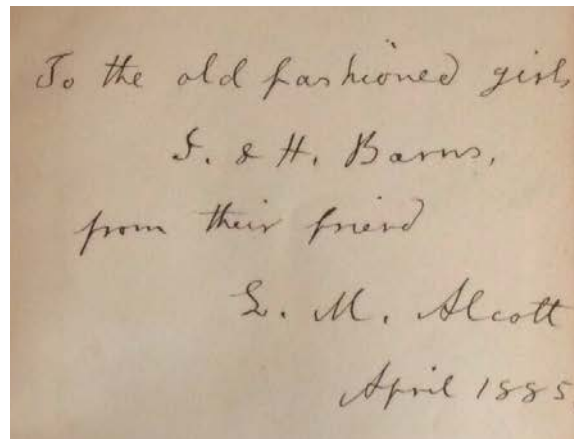


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Publishers,” as there was a need to protect members of the group from a government that opposed women’s rights.

**16. A Presentation Copy of Louisa May Alcott's *Old-Fashioned Girl* and an Unpublished Poem, "To Constance – A Real Old Fashioned Girl."**

Louisa May Alcott. *An Old-Fashioned Girl*. Boston. Roberts Brothers. 1884. 8vo. Green cloth binding with gilt and red lettering and designs. Black and white illustrations. 378 pages. A later edition of *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870) inscribed on the front free endpaper: "To the old fashioned girls / I. & H. Barns, / from their friend / L. M. Alcott / April 1885." Acquired on eBay in 2020.



As noted in the previous item (the Russian translation of *Little Women*), *An Old-Fashioned Girl* contains one of Alcott's most powerful scenes advocating full rights for women. In Chapter XIII, "The Sunny Side," Polly, the country-girl heroine, introduces Fanny, her city friend, to some of her new "bohemian" companions – a small community of women who are living together happily. One of them, Becky, is a sculptor who is trying to create the woman of the future. Another is an author, Kate, a stand-in for Louisa May Alcott herself. Both the setting and the conversation carry a great deal of the perspective of Ms Alcott on what the role of women should be – and how it was right to be "strong-minded" (a contemporary negative moniker for a suffragette).

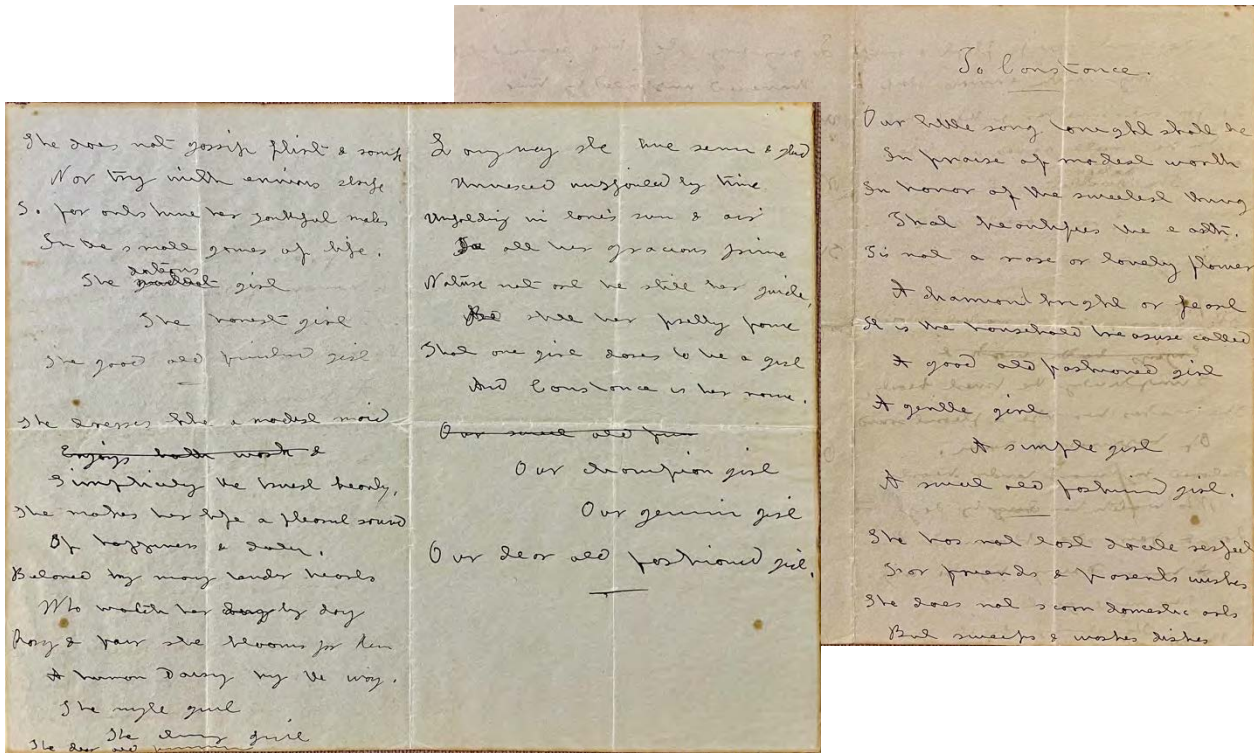
As is clear from the content of the novel and its 1885 inscription,<sup>54</sup> for Alcott the term "old-fashioned girl" meant a young woman endowed with positive values as well as common sense. This is emphasized throughout the original Alcott poem described below: the main character (for whom Louisa composed it) doesn't shirk domestic arts like washing dishes or sweeping the floor – nor does she waste time in gossip, flirting, or trying to "outshine" her friends. Instead, this "human Daisy" brings joy to all as she follows Nature – not artfulness – and "dares to be a girl /And Constance is her name."

L. M. Alcott. "To Constance – A Real Old Fashioned Girl." c. 1882. Single sheet of paper, 8 by 10 in., folded in two. Unpublished manuscript poem written for Constance Emery, daughter of

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<sup>54</sup> The identification of the recipients, I. and H. Barns remains a mystery as of the writing of this essay. Hopefully their identities will be revealed at some point.

Samuel Emery Jr., of Quincy, Illinois, who ran the Concord Summer School of Philosophy from 1879 to 1888. Acquired at auction in 2017.



WITH

Alcott ephemera: two thin paper advertisements for her novels of the type distributed on trains and in stations. Acquired from the great-niece of a caretaker of the Alcott family in 1996.

Two ephemeral handbills capture the growing popularity of Louisa May Alcott's stories for children of all ages. The first (April 1870<sup>55</sup>) announces: 23,000 SOLD! 25<sup>th</sup> 1,000 PRINTING! LITTLE WOMEN; or MEG, JO, BETH and AMY. By LOUISA M. ALCOTT. FOR SALE ON THESE CARS. The second (1873) promotes A NEW NOVEL by the AUTHOR of LITTLE WOMEN. WORK: A STORY of EXPERIENCE, with, as on the front cover of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition, the image of a bee. The WORK handbill serves as the backdrop for the cover of this catalogue.

<sup>55</sup> Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy. "The Sales of Louisa May Alcott's Books." Harvard Library Bulletin. Cambridge. New Series. Spring 1990. Vol. 1. No. 1. p. 69.

23,000 SOLD! 25th 1,000 PRINTING!

"MAKE THEIR ACQUAINTANCE; FOR AMY WILL BE FOUND DELIGHTFUL, BETH VERY LOVELY, MEG BEAUTIFUL, AND JO SPLENDID!"—*The Catholic World*.

## LITTLE WOMEN;

OR, MEG, JO, BETH AND AMY.

By **LOUISA M. ALCOTT.**

With 8 Illustrations. In two parts. Price of each part, \$1.50.

Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher, in the July No. of "The Mother at Home," says:—

"We remember, years ago, 'in war time,' reading a little pamphlet, entitled 'Hospital Sketches,' written with great humor and pathos, and, therefore, we took up the first volume of 'Little Women' with a pleasant feeling of acquaintance with the author. This feeling grew into a hearty friendship by the time we had finished the second part.

"Miss Alcott has the enviable faculty of making her characters say and do just what they really would have said and done, were they real personages. It has been hinted that it was a story of actual life, and we should feel that our favorite 'Jo' must have been drawn from the author's personal experiences, were it not so difficult to tell one's own story with the vivid naturalness with which this one is told. It is amusing to see with how much spirit this simple little book is discussed by elderly people, who generally look upon young folks' story-books as foolish things, at the best. We have known one grave lady take Jo's refusal of Laurie more to heart than that young gentleman, for he got over it, and our friend has not yet ceased grumbling!

"'Little Women,' with its truthful pictures of girlish joys and sorrows, of homely sports and labors, of womanly loves and cares, will be dearly loved by all youthful readers, and warmly appreciated by wiser heads. We hope the wonderful success with which it has been met,—we saw the publisher's notice of the *fourteenth thousand* some weeks ago,—will encourage Miss Alcott to make another attempt in the same direction."

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LITTLE WOMEN."

MISS ALCOTT'S NEW BOOK.

HOSPITAL SKETCHES, AND CAMP AND  
FIRESIDE STORIES.

With illustrations. One volume, to match "Little Women."  
Price, \$1.50.

In addition to the *Hospital Sketches*,—a work of such marked ability that it at once secured the fame of its author,—the volume contains the following stories:—

"*King of Clubs and Queen of Hearts*," "*Mrs. Podgers' Teapot*," "*My Contraband*," "*Love and Loyalty*," "*A Modern Cinderella*," "*The Blue and the Gray*," "*A Hospital Christmas*," "*An Hour*."

*From the Springfield Republican.*

"We predict for the new collection as great popularity as 'Little Women' has found. The 'Sketches' were originally letters written from Washington, when Miss Alcott was an hospital nurse there, in the winter of 1862-63."

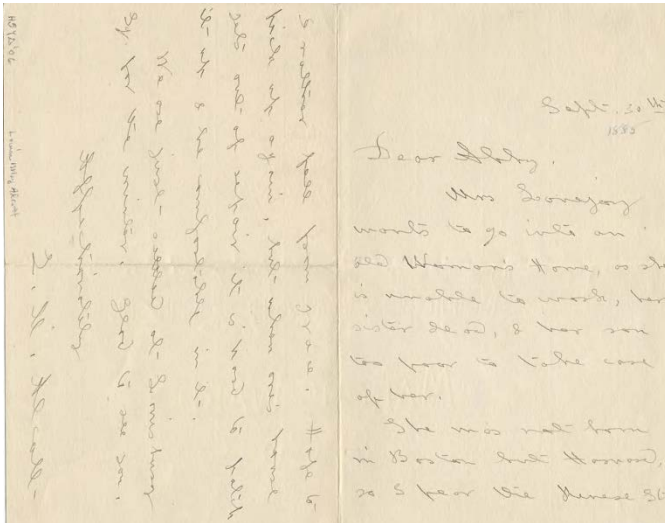
ROBERTS BROTHERS, *Publishers, Boston.*

 FOR SALE ON THESE CARS.

(OVER.)

## 17. Louisa May Alcott Autograph Letter Seeking Assistance for An Old Family Friend, Mrs. Lovejoy

Louisa May Alcott. Autograph Letter, Signed. To Abby (most likely her cousin, Abigail May<sup>56</sup>). Sept 30 (someone, not Alcott, has written "1885" below the date). Single sheet of paper, 7 by 9 in., folded to create four pages. Acquired from an autograph dealer in the US in 2020.



A moving letter from Louisa to her cousin requesting assistance for an old family friend, Mrs. Lovejoy. Louisa reminds Abby how helpful Mrs. Lovejoy was to both their mothers long ago. This is almost certainly Mrs. J. W. Lovejoy of Harvard, MA, whose property adjoined that of the short-lived Fruitlands Commune begun by Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane in 1843. Mrs. Lovejoy and her children visited Abba Alcott often, providing companionship and support to the over-stretched Abba. It was the Lovejoys who offered the Alcotts room in their home when Fruitlands collapsed in January of 1844. It is moving that Louisa expressed the desire to care for her some 41 years later.

Sept. 30th

Dear Abby,

*Mrs. Lovejoy wants to go into an Old Woman's Home, as she is unable to work, her sister dead, & her son too poor to take care of her. She was not born in Boston but Harvard, so I fear the Revere St. Home is not open to her. Can you tell me where she can go; & what the cost of getting her in would be? I should like to help the poor little soul into a quiet harbor for the rest of her days, & thought you might like to lend a hand as she was faithful to our mothers in her small way.*

*I was sorry to see in a paper that you were still poorly. But as newspaper report has born, married & buried me many times I hope it lies now & then...*

*We are just settled at Louisburg Sq.<sup>57</sup> for the winter. Good to see you.*

*Affectionately*

*L. M. Alcott*

<sup>56</sup> Most likely Abigail Williams May, daughter of Samuel May and Mary Goddard May, who was Louisa's mother's first cousin. In other letters to Abigail, Louisa addressed her as "Abby." For more on Abby, see [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Representative\\_women\\_of\\_New\\_England/Abby\\_Williams\\_May](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Representative_women_of_New_England/Abby_Williams_May)

<sup>57</sup> The Alcotts purchased a home in fashionable Louisburg Square in Boston in the 1880s.



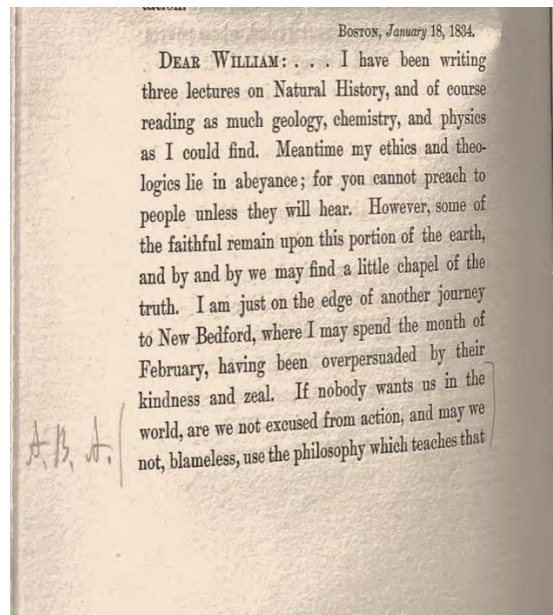
## 18. Louisa May Alcott's Annotated Copy of *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*.

James Eliot Cabot, Editor. *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Houghton Mifflin & Co. Boston and New York. 1887. 8vo. Two volumes. Publisher's blue cloth with gilt titles, top edges gilt. Ink stamp of "F. ALCOTT PRATT" on the front paste-down, under which Frederick Pratt's wife, Jessica, wrote, "Keep – First Edition. Do not loan." Louisa May Alcott's copy with her annotations. Acquired from a rare book dealer in the US in 1994.

For decades Ralph Waldo Emerson shone a huge, comforting light upon the Alcotts. He was ever helpful to the family of the often financially stretched dreamer, Bronson Alcott, who was called by many "the most transcendental of the Transcendentalists." As an adolescent, Louisa eagerly borrowed books from Emerson's large library, and later acknowledged the crush she had on "her Master." Emerson's died in May of 1882, and six months later Bronson Alcott suffered a stroke that left him unable to speak. Louisa visited him regularly to share news, as he was still an active listener. The earthly end for both father and daughter came in March of 1888. As they shared a birthday – November 29 – so they died within two days of each other: Bronson on March 4 and Louisa on March 6. One of the joys that came to Louisa in her last five months was savoring the two-volume biography of the Alcott's true friend, *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by the Emerson family's chosen literary executor, James Eliot Cabot.

Throughout *A Memoir* there are dozens of scored passages and dog-eared pages. Louisa recorded the progress of her reading in a journal and wrote her father about the memoir.<sup>58</sup> Coming to a passage that reminded her of her father, she wrote his initials, "A.B.A." in the margin:

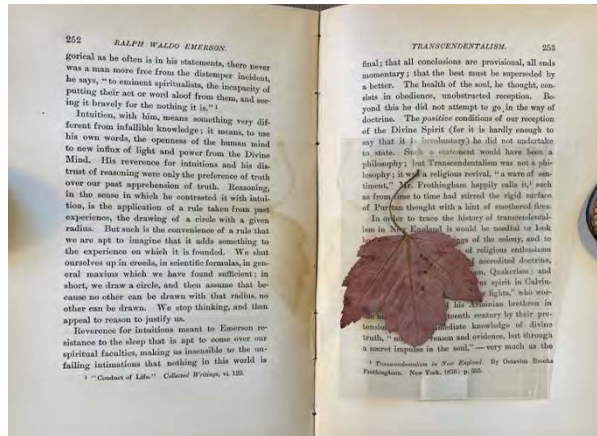
*If nobody wants us in the world are we not excused from action, and may we not, blameless, use the philosophy which teaches that by all events the individual is made wiser, and that this may be an ultimate object in the benevolence of the Creator?*<sup>59</sup>



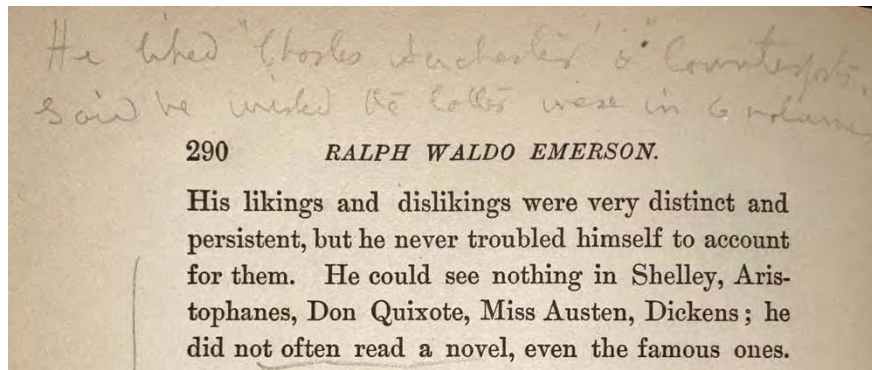
<sup>58</sup> See, e.g. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy, Editors and Madeleine Stern, Associate Editor. *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*. Little Brown & Company. Boston/Toronto/London. 1989. p. 316 and Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy, Editors and Madeleine Stern, Associate Editor. *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*. Little Brown & Company. Boston/Toronto/London. 1987. p. 321.

<sup>59</sup> *Journals of LMA*: "ABA" on p. 214; Maple Leaf between pp. 252-53; *Charles Auchester and Bhagavad Gita* on p. 290.

Between two pages lies a well-preserved red maple leaf that has offset onto either side. It is easy to imagine Lulu, Louisa's 8-year old niece, bringing the leaf from the yard. Indeed, as is clear from journals and letters, Lulu was a frequent visitor when Louisa was reading this work in mid-October.



Describing the reading habits and preferences of Emerson, Cabot noted that he "... did not often read a novel, even the famous ones." Alcott, the successful author, took issue. At the top of the page she wrote, "*He liked 'Charles Auchester' & 'Counterparts'. Said he wished the latter were in 6 volumes.*"<sup>60</sup>

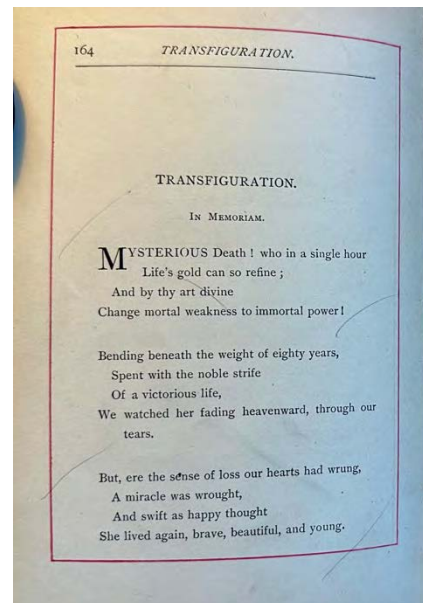
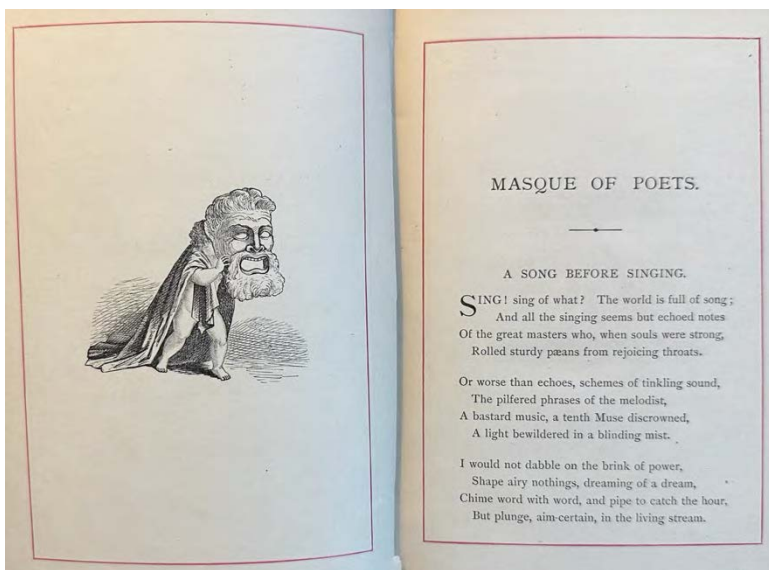


It is on this same page that Cabot recorded that among Emerson's favorite books were, "...the Oriental (particularly the Hindoo) religious books, the Bhagavat Gita, the Puranas, and Upanishads." Reading that sentence and finding that Louisa underlined those three titles, brought much joy and affirmation in 1994. Truth be told, it is a fountain of inspiration that continues to flow today.

<sup>60</sup> *Charles Auchester* [1853] and *Counterparts* [1854] were novels written anonymously by an Englishwoman, Elizabeth Sara Sheppard. Both deal with the concept of "affinities" – sympathetic vibrations/emotions felt between two people. Emerson's copy of *Counterparts* was in three volumes – thus the comment indicating he wished it had been twice as long. It is interesting that Thoreau also read and enjoyed Miss Sheppard's *Counterparts* – a fact not noted in many Thoreau biographies. See his journal entry for February 20, 1859 where he recorded that its "illustration of Love and Friendship showing how much we can know of each other through sympathy merely, without any of the ordinary information" was "very interesting."

## 19. *A Masque of Poets* – Alcott Family Copy, Perhaps Read at Louisa’s Memorial Service

Louisa May Alcott. “Transfiguration” in George Parsons Lathrop, Editor. *A Masque of Poets*. Boston. Roberts Brothers. 8vo. Redline Edition, bound in black cloth. The first edition (1878) of 2000 copies sold so well that Roberts Brothers issued a deluxe “Redline Edition” in December. Each poem was framed by a red-lined box and the book was bound with beveled edges and stamped in gold. On the front pastedown is the bookplate of John Sewall Pratt Alcott (1865-1923), Louisa’s nephew, adopted by her in 1887 so he might become the legal heir to her estate. Louisa’s poem “Transfiguration,” written to honor her mother after she died in 1877, was read at the private service for Louisa. In this copy, several stanzas of the poem are marked in pencil in a manner that may indicate they were read aloud. Acquired from a rare book dealer in the US in 1993.



*Masque of Poets* was #14 of 37 volumes issued by Roberts Brothers in their well-received “No Name Series.” The object was to allow authors to write anonymously – free from the constraints of expectations based on past work – and for the public to guess who the author of each volume might be. Along with having a poem in this volume, Louisa published a novel in the series, #6, *A Modern Mephistopheles*, in 1877.<sup>61</sup> Today *A Masque of Poets* is sought after as it contains “Success,” the only poem of Emily Dickinson to appear in book form in her lifetime.

Newspapers of the day reported on the service held for Louisa at 10 Louisburg Square in Boston:

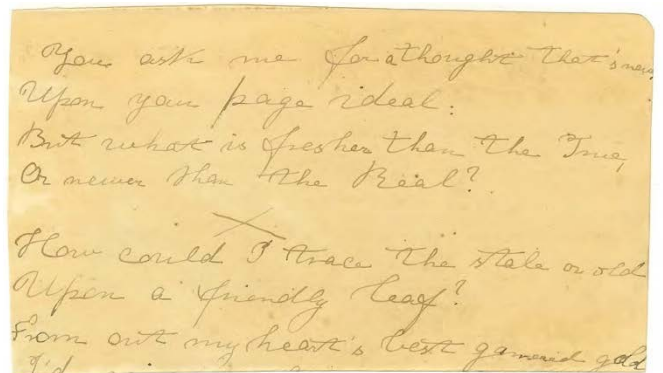
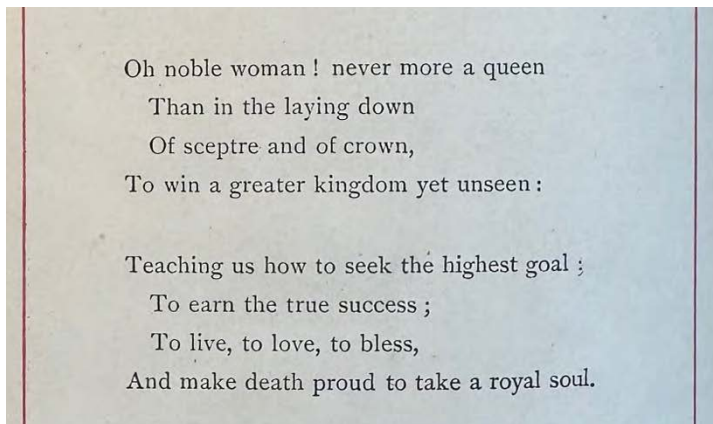
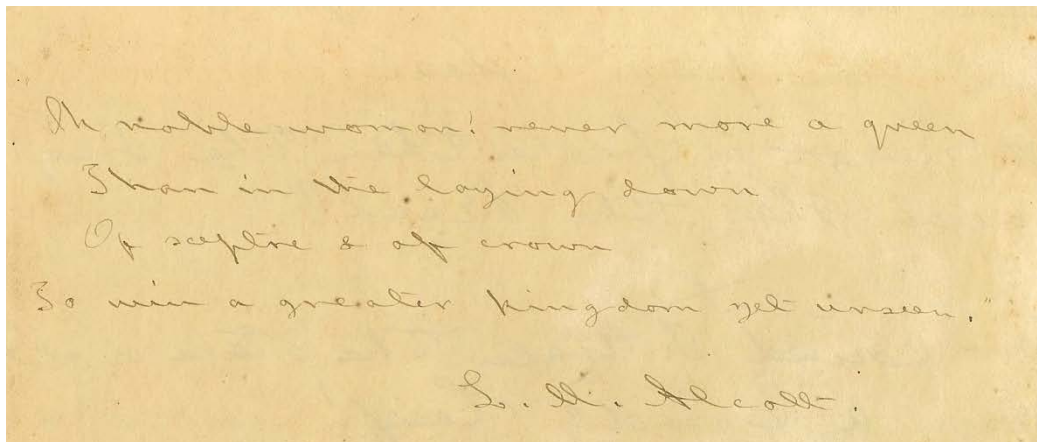
*The services were strictly private, all those in attendance being especially invited. Among them were Miss Ellen Emerson and Dr. Edward Emerson, Rev. and Mrs. Samuel May, and*

<sup>61</sup> Part of the inspiration for *A Modern Mephistopheles*, a gothic tale wherein a contemporary poet sells his soul to the devil, was an unpublished tale of “blood and thunder” that Louisa had written a decade before. In 1994 the manuscript for that novel, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, was acquired by the writer who edited it and saw it through publication to the *New York Times Bestseller List*. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Long\\_Fatal\\_Love\\_Chase](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Long_Fatal_Love_Chase)

Miss Abby W. May. Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Pratt, John Pratt Alcott, the adopted son of Miss Alcott, and the little niece and adopted daughter, Louisa May Alcott Nieriker, represented the family... Mrs. Harriet Winslow Sewell read Miss Alcott's poem, "Transfiguration," written in memory of her mother, and whose beautiful words were not less applicable to herself.<sup>62</sup>

WITH

Accompanying *A Masque of Poets* is a manuscript fair copy of the penultimate stanza of "Transfiguration," signed by Louisa (with no date or place). Louisa wrote this on a page of someone's autograph album as there is a partial original composition on the verso (see images). At some point it was excised and framed, with only the Alcott AMS on display. Acquired from an autograph dealer in the US in 2022.



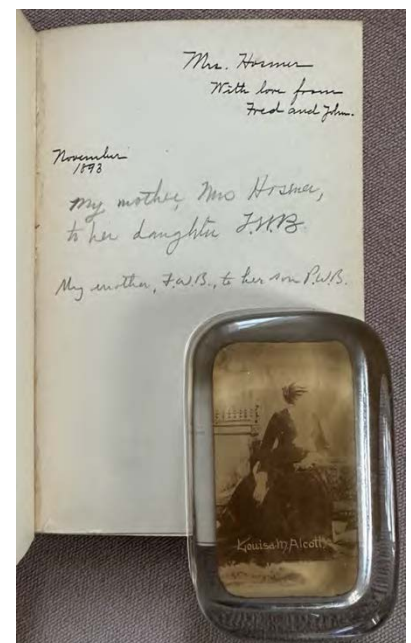
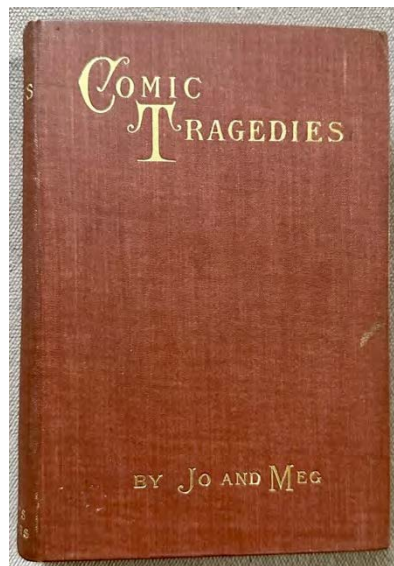
<sup>62</sup> *The Boston Globe*, Friday March 9, 1888. p. 3.

## 20. A Presentation of Comic Tragedies – the “Little Men” to the Alcott Family Physician

Anna B. Pratt (1831–1893) and Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888). *Comic Tragedies: Written by “Jo” and “Meg” and Acted by the “Little Women.”* Boston. Roberts Brothers. 1893. 8vo. Rust colored cloth boards. An alternate binding not in BAL, with gilt title and names of the authors as in the trade edition, but no designs. 317 pages. Features six plays the Alcott sisters wrote and produced in the 1840s. Included are an explanatory foreword by Meg (Anna) and six pieces: “Norna; or, The Witch’s Curse,” “The Captive of Castile; or, The Moorish Maiden’s Vow,” “The Greek Slave,” “Ion,” “Bianca: an Operatic Tragedy,” and “The Unloved Wife; or, Woman’s Faith.” A presentation copy from Anna’s sons, Fred and John Pratt, to Dr. Laura Hosmer, the Alcott family physician. Inscribed in ink on the front-free endpaper, “Mrs. Hosmer / With love from / Fred and John. / November / 1893.” Acquired at auction in 1995.

After collecting and editing the manuscripts for these early dramatic productions, Anna Pratt saw them through an initial print-run of 5000 copies in June of 1893.<sup>63</sup> The publishers, Roberts Brothers, were banking on the popularity of anything Alcott. In a seven-page foreword Anna outlined the roles each of the Alcott sisters preferred:

*Jo [Louisa], of course, played the villains, ghosts, bandits, and disdainful Queens; for her tragedy-loving soul delighted in the lurid parts, and no drama was perfect in her eyes without a touch of the demonic or supernatural. Meg [Anna herself] loved the sentimental roles, the tender maiden with the airy robes and flowing locks, who made impossible sacrifices for ideal lovers, or the cavalier, singing soft serenades and performing lofty acts of gallantry and prowess. Amy [May] was the fairy sprite, while Beth [Elizabeth] enacted the passage or messenger when the scene required their aid.<sup>64</sup> Pages seven and eight*



The June printing occurred a few weeks before Anna’s death on July 17, 1893. Four months later, her sons gave this copy to Dr. Hosmer. A later inscription shows the book passed from Dr. Hosmer to her daughter, Florence W. Brown, and then to Florence’s son, Percy. All were

<sup>63</sup> Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy. “The Sales of Louisa May Alcott’s Books.” *Harvard Library Bulletin*. Cambridge. New Series. Spring 1990. Vol. 1. No. 1. p. 85.

<sup>64</sup> Anna B. Pratt. *Comic Tragedies*. Boston. Roberts Brothers. 1893. pp. 7-8.

prominent members of Concord, including its antiquarian society. Florence wrote an excellent account of Bronson Alcott's Summer School of Philosophy, privately printed in 1926. In it she noted, "My mother... had been the Alcotts' family physician, and between her and Miss Louisa Alcott there grew up a very close friendship so that the Alcott home was almost as familiar to me as my own, and Miss Louisa was the same as a very dear relative to me."<sup>65</sup>

#### WITH

A cabinet photo of Louisa visiting with the famed American Thespian, James Murdoch (1811-1893), seated on a bench in a garden, likely in Princeton, Massachusetts in July/August 1887. Louisa heard Murdoch perform as early as 1865 and in the summer of 1887 was treated to a steady stream of lively conversation and readings of Shakespeare. Acquired from a rare book dealer in the US in 2022.



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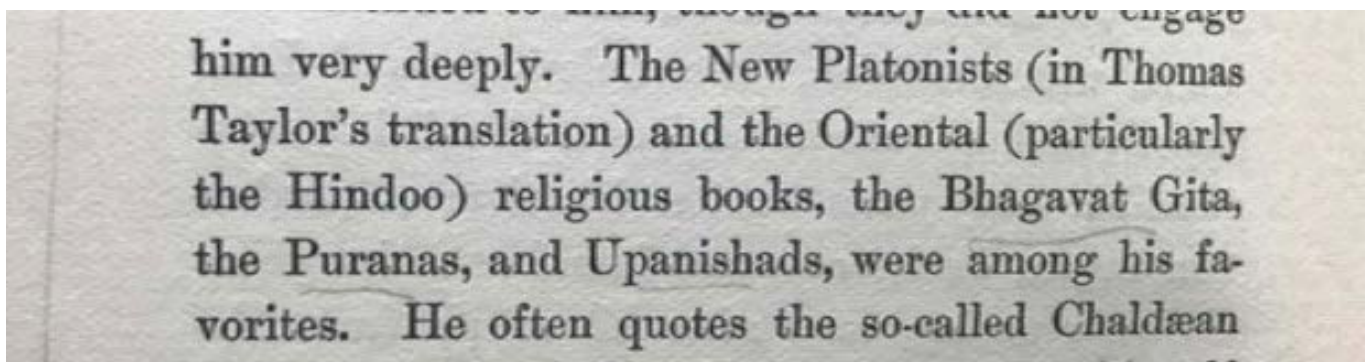
<sup>65</sup> Florence Whiting Brown. *Alcott and the Concord School of Philosophy*. Privately Printed. 1926 (from a paper read at the Concord Antiquarian Society on May 28, 1923). p. 3. The Alcott Family Collection holds an inscribed copy of this scarce booklet, given by Florence W. Brown to Emma F. Smith in 1927.

## Redux: The Discovery of Louisa's Copy of *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*.

On my 47<sup>th</sup> birthday, May 13, 1994, a package of books arrived from a Massachusetts book dealer. It was James Eliot Cabot's *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1887) in two volumes. As it had the ownership stamp of Fred Alcott Pratt, Louisa's nephew, the dealer thought it might appeal to me. I opened the package and began to page through Vol I. After a while, I came to pencil markings in the margin – and not only did the style appear to be Louisa's, but the sections marked seemed like they would have interested her, I kept going – and the pencil marks continued. On p. 214 my heart leapt: in the margin Louisa wrote her father's initials, "A.B.A." next to a passage that provided an apt description of her father (see above, Item #18). I kept going and found more writing in her hand. Between pp. 252 and 253 lay the maple leaf described and illustrated in the narrative above. And then I came to an entire sentence in her hand at the top of p. 290. This was the point where she took issue with Cabot's observation that Emerson did not like novels.

On the same page was the paragraph about how Emerson was drawn to the Oriental religious books – particularly of the Hindus: the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Puranas* and the *Upanishads*. On the one hand, I had known this, as my research had uncovered the fact that Thoreau, Emerson and Bronson Alcott were, for example, reading and discussing the *Bhagavad Gita*. But to see it in print was powerful in that it brought the reality home. And then to see that Louisa herself had underlined those sacred texts... wow! I took a deep breath, leaned back, exhaled, and smiled at this affirmation of the life path I chose in the late 1960s.

The "birthday gift" that came that day is both the least expensive item in my collection (\$50) and that piece with which I feel the strongest emotional connection. Its value cannot be measured. Now and then I take it from the shelf to page through the contents. When I arrive at the following, inspiration flows once again:



Kent Bicknell  
New Hampton, NH  
[kentbicknell@me.com](mailto:kentbicknell@me.com)  
603-340-0644  
April 15, 2023