



Life, Letters and Journals

Louisa May Alcott

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Life, Letters and Journals Details

Date : Published November 30th 2005 by Adamant Media Corporation (first published 1889)

ISBN : 9781402183843

Author : Louisa May Alcott

Format : Paperback 375 pages

Genre : Biography, Biography Memoir, History, Nonfiction

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and work. Being obsessed with Alcott and her family and thier circle, I've read a good many volumes and I still feel that I learned a few new bits from this early work.

Laura says

What a surprise to discover that this book that had been sitting on my parent's bookshelf for forever is from 1889 - at least that's what I'm guessing. There's no face page and the only date attached is 1889 from the dedication. I'll have to treat it more carefully.

While reading letters about Louisa May Alcott's life is fascinating, the compiler (I think it was her aunt) does a horribly amateur job of bringing the correspondences together smoothly. Some events are out of order and facts are often stated twice - first in an aside by the compiler, then in the letters themselves (sometimes using the same wording). It was somewhat stilting to read.

Still, I'm surprised at how hard-working and down-to-earth LMA was. She supported most of her family, first through various odd jobs then with her writings. I can't believe how complacent she was about her useless father. Instead of getting a real job and supporting his wife and four (later three) children, he was a philosopher, traveling and giving lectures at parties and universities - often without pay. Thus Louisa and her mother and sisters had to take up work to support themselves. Aside from this annoyance the book is brimming with details of life at that time and of a worthwhile individual.

Deb says

My copy of this book is a hand-me-down from my Great Aunt Mary Henderson Holland Houlberg - so it is almost 100 years old. Also have Little Men and Jack and Jill from the same set.

Sanitized by the editor, Louisa's own voice fascinated me as a teenager.

Drebbles says

Compiled and edited in 1889 by Ednah Cheney, this book offers an interesting look into the life of Louisa May Alcott. Cheney intersperses the letters and journal entries with some biographical information. The Alcotts were very poor and lived off the money Louisa made from her writing; Alcott keeps track of how much money she gets for each story, even after the success of "Little Women". Unfortunately, the amount of time she spent writing (up to 14 hours a day), plus the illness she caught after nursing civil war soldiers took a toll on her and many of her letters, plus many of the journal entries mention her various illnesses and describe how she had to take morphine to help her sleep.

Fans of "Little Women" will be most interested in the segments regarding that book and may be surprised to find out that Alcott thought the book was boring. It's hard to believe she really meant that because it's clear from her letters and journal entries how very biographical "Little Women" is. In fact, Alcott's journal description of Beth's death in real life is used almost word for word in the book. Other elements in "Little Women" are fiction (there was, alas, no real life Professor Bhaer and Alcott included him against her better

judgement - she would have preferred Jo remain single, as Alcott herself did) and Teddy was based on a Polish acquaintance, not a next door neighbor. However, the four sisters are based on Louisa and her sisters and the journal entries and letters make you realize how perfectly she caught them on paper.

This is an interesting book about not only a fascinating woman but also a fascinating family. The Alcotts' friends included the Emersons, the Thoreaus and the Hawthornes, all whose influences helped shape Louisa May Alcott's writings. Despite her success, her life was not an easy one and was often filled with sorrow. Yet, despite her sorrow and illnesses, Louise May Alcott's works enchanted children then and now.

Phil Syphe says

I found this true account of arguably one of the greatest fiction writers of all time quite inspiring. I liked the way Louisa's mother encouraged her from a young age. It was interesting to see how the aspiring author started out making a few dollars here and there, gradually building up a reputation, which in time led to great success and wealth.

Miss Alcott strikes me as a good-natured woman who cared about others whilst reserving her right for privacy when she wanted space from the limelight. I feel that anyone who knew her was most fortunate and any readers of her works who got the chance to meet her were privileged.

I seem to be one of few men who appreciate Louisa May Alcott's literary talents. That said, this work shows that she did have male admirers of various ages during her lifetime, which is good to know.

Obviously certain stories are aimed solely at young girls, but there's a good share of material that should appeal to both sexes of all ages, plus LMA wrote some quality thrillers. Interestingly, she was dismissive of the thrillers herself, though the ones I've read to date strike me as excellent.

This volume was constructed by Ednah Cheney, who did a decent though not brilliant job. On the plus side, she fills in gaps that Miss Alcott's letters and journals omit. But, annoyingly, at times Ms Cheney relays certain information only for the reader to have the same info repeated in Miss Alcott's own words a few paragraphs later.

But this is only a small gripe with an otherwise impressive attempt to produce something of this nature in a short space of time. It was first published just over a year after Ms Alcott's sad demise.

Leslie Angel says

Mostly a reread as I've read her journals, but a while ago. There's much to admire about her.

Leslie says

Extremely interesting. Well put-together collection of her best letters and journal entries. I could read her journal entries and letters about her trips to Europe every day and never get tired of them. I'm so glad I found

this charming book. I especially liked learning so much more about the rest of the family, all were interesting and all are described in this book. The youngest sister, May, was especially interesting. The father was not as bad as I'd previously thought. Was it Lincoln who said you only dislike those you don't know well enough?
