

**RECOLLECTIONS OF LOUISA  
MAY ALCOTT, JOHN GREENLEAF  
WHITTIER, AND ROBERT  
BROWNING: TOGETHER WITH  
SEVERAL MEMORIAL POEMS**

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Recollections of Louisa May Alcott, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Robert Browning: Together with several memorial poems by Maria S. Porter

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**MARIA S. PORTER**

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LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

At the Age of Twenty.

FROM AN UNFINISHED PORTRAIT IN POSSESSION OF MRS. PRATT.



Recollections of Louisa May Alcott,  
John Greenleaf Whittier, and Robert  
Browning, together with several  
memorial poems. Illustrated.

By  
Maria S. Porter.



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## RECOLLECTIONS OF LOUISA MAY ALCOTT.\*



O name in American literature has more thrilled the hearts of the young people of this generation than that of Louisa May Alcott. What a life of beneficence and self-abnegation was hers! How distinctively was her character an outcome of the best New England ancestry! In her veins ran the blood of the Quincys, the Mays, the Alcotts, and the Sewalls. What better inheritance could one have? How important a factor in life is heredity! One is so enriched, strengthened, and upborne by a good ancestry, or sometimes, alas! so handicapped, baffled, and utterly defeated in the conflicts of life by bad hereditary influence, that when one has so fine an inheritance as was Louisa Alcott's, one should be thankful for it and rejoice in it as she did.

In looking back upon Miss Alcott's life, heroic and faithful to the end, it is the woman who interests us even more than the writer, whose phenomenal success in touching the hearts of old and young is known so well the world over. "Do the duty that lies nearest," was her life motto, and to its fulfilment were given hand and brain and heart. Helen Hunt Jackson once wrote of her, "Miss Alcott is really a benefactor of households." Truer words were never written. She was proud of her ancestors. I remember a characteristic expression of hers as we sat together one morning in June, 1876, in the Old South Meeting-House, where was assembled an immense audience stirred to a white heat of patriotic enthusiasm by the fervid eloquence of Wendell Phillips, whose plea to save that sacred landmark from the vandals who were ready to destroy it can never be forgotten. At the conclusion of Phillips's speech she turned to me, her face aglow

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with emotion, and said, "I am proud of my foremothers and forefathers, and especially of my Sewall blood, even if the good old judge did condemn the witches to be hanged." After a moment of silence she added, "I am glad that he felt remorse, and had the manliness to confess it. He was made of the right stuff." Of this ancestor, Whittier wrote in "The Prophecy of Samuel Sewall": —



Amos Brandon Alcott.

"Stately and slow, with solemn air,  
His black cap hiding his whitened hair,  
Walks the Judge of the great Assize,  
Samuel Sewall, the good and wise;  
His face with lines of firmness wrought,  
He wears the look of a man unbought."

Of the name of Quincy, Oliver Wendell Holmes has written in "Dorothy Q": —

"Look not on her with eyes of scorn,  
Dorothy Q was a lady born!  
Ay! since the galloping Normans came,  
England's annals have known her name;  
And still to the three-hilled rebel town  
Dear is that ancient name's renown,  
For many a civic wreath they won,  
The youthful sire and the gray-haired son."

Miss Alcott began to write at a very early age. Her childhood and early girlhood were passed in the pure sweet atmosphere of a home where love reigned. Louisa and her sister Anna were educated in a desultory and fragmentary manner, or, perhaps one should say, without system. Mr. and Mrs. Alcott, the two Misses Peabody, Thoreau, Miss Mary Russell, and Mr. Lane had a share in their education. Mrs. Hawthorne taught Anna to read, and I think Louisa once spoke of her to me as her own first teacher.

Mrs. Alcott was a remarkable woman, a great reader, with a broad practical mind, deep love of humanity, wide charity, untiring energy, and a highly sensitive organization, married to a man whom she devotedly loved, who was absolutely devoid of practical knowledge of life, an idealist of the extremest type. With the narrowest means, her trials, perplexities, and privations were very great, but she bore them all with heroic courage and fidelity, and with unwavering affection for her husband. Louisa early recognized all this. She soon developed the

distinguishing traits of both father and mother. Emerson, soon after he made Mr. Alcott's acquaintance, recognized his consummate ability as a conversationalist, and was through life his most loyal friend. Louisa was very proud of her father's intellectual acquirements, and it was most interesting to hear her tell of the high tributes paid him by some of the great thinkers of the age. In a note to me in October, 1882, just after her father had been stricken with paralysis, she wrote: —

"My poor dear father lies dumb and helpless. He seems to know us all; and it is so pathetic to see my handsome, hale, active old father changed at one fell blow into this helpless wreck. You know that he wrote those forty remarkable sonnets last winter, and these, with his cares as Dean of the School of Philosophy and his many lectures there, were enough to break down a man of eighty-three years. I continually protested and warned him against overwork and taxation of the brain, but 'twas of no avail. Wasn't I doing the same thing myself? I did not practise what I preached, and indeed I have great cause for fear that I may be some day stricken down as he is. He seems so tired of living; his active mind beats against the prison bars. Did I ever tell you what Mr. Emerson once said of him to me? 'Louisa, your father could have talked with Plato.' Was not that praise worth having? Since then I have often in writing addressed him as 'My dear old Plato.'"



Mrs. Alcott.

Just after the publication of the "Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson," I found her reading it one day. Her face was radiant with delight as she said: "Let me read you what Emerson wrote to Carlyle just before father went to England: 'I shall write again soon, for Bronson Alcott will probably go to England in about a month, and him I shall surely send you, hoping to atone by his great nature for many smaller ones that have craved to see you.'" Again she read: "He is a great man and is made for what is greatest." . . . "Alcott has returned to Concord with his wife and children and taken a cottage and an acre of ground, to get his living by the help of God and his own spade. I see that some of the education people in England have a school called "Alcott House," after my friend. At home here he is despised and rejected of men as much as ever was Pestalozzi. But the creature thinks and talks, and I am proud of my neighbor."