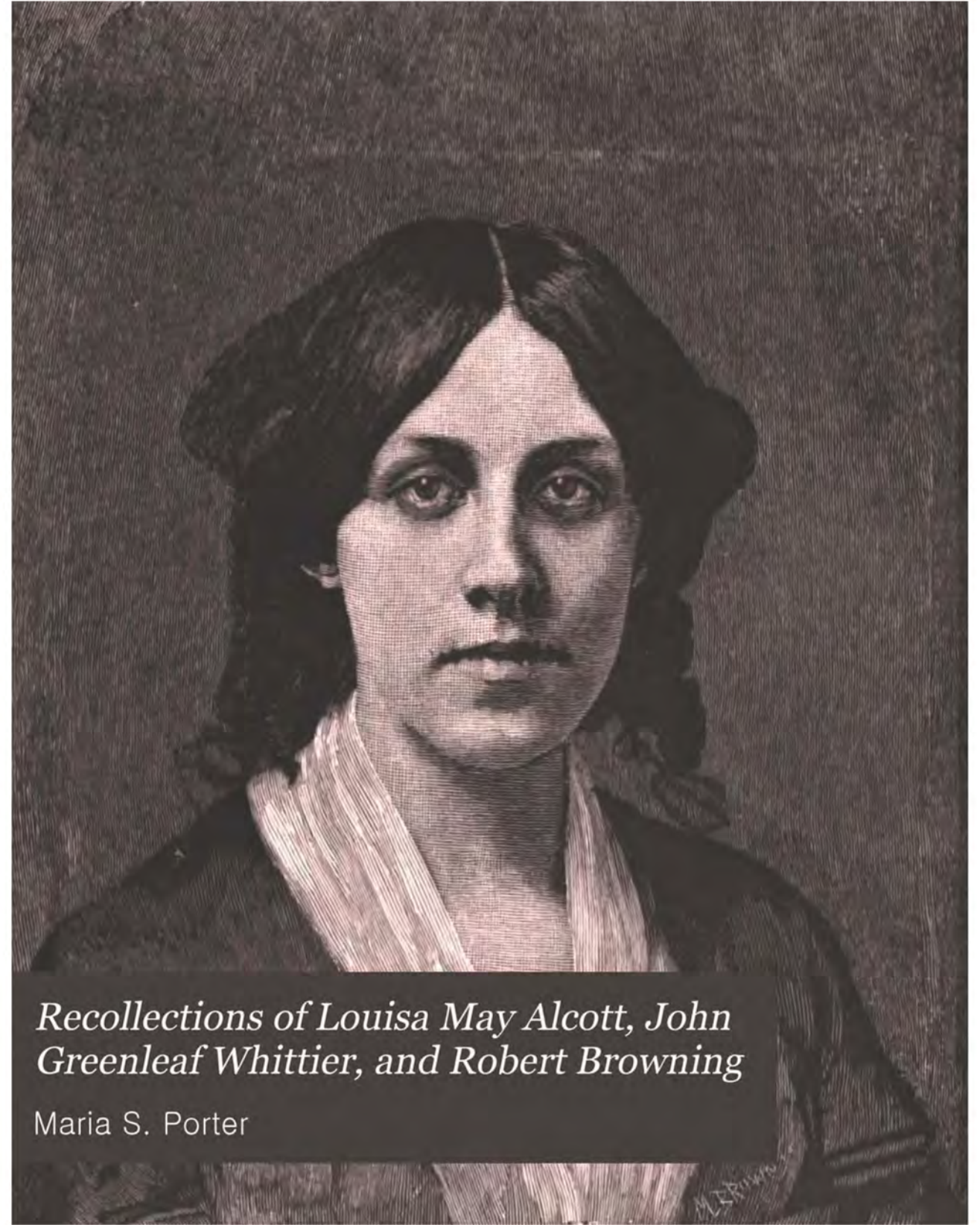

Recollections of Louisa May Alcott, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Robert Browning

Maria S. Porter

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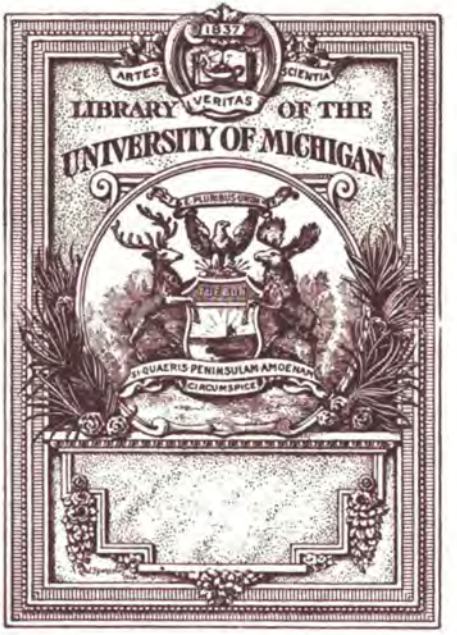


For

Mr. C. E. Hunt
with best wishes for
the New Year
from his friend
Marie J. Yates

Jan. 1st 1893.

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

At the Age of Twenty.

FROM AN UNPUBLISHED PORTRAIT IN POSSESSION OF MRS. PRATT.

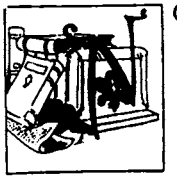
Recollections of Louisa May Alcott, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Robert Browning, together with several memorial poems. Illustrated.

By

Maria S. Porter.

Published for the Author by
The New England Magazine Corporation.
1893.

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 Bronson 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: —

Mrs. Alcott.

"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.'"

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.'"

ORCHARD HOUSE, CONCORD.
The Home of the "Little Women."

Carlyle's estimate of Alcott, although not as high as Emerson's, was a fairly appreciative one. He wrote to Emerson after Alcott's visits to him: —

"He is a genial, innocent, simple-hearted man, of much natural intelligence and goodness, with an air of rusticity, veracity, and dignity withal, which in many ways appeals to me. The good Alcott, with his long, lean face and figure, his gray, worn temples and mild radiant eyes, all bent on saving the world by a return to the Golden Age; he comes before one like a kind Don Quixote, whom nobody can even laugh at without loving."

Louisa, after reading these extracts, taken from different parts of the books, said with emphasis: "It takes great men like Emerson and Carlyle and Thoreau to appreciate father at his best." She always spoke with great freedom and frankness of her father's lack of practical ability; and very pathetic were some of the stories she told of her own early struggles to earn money for the family needs; of her

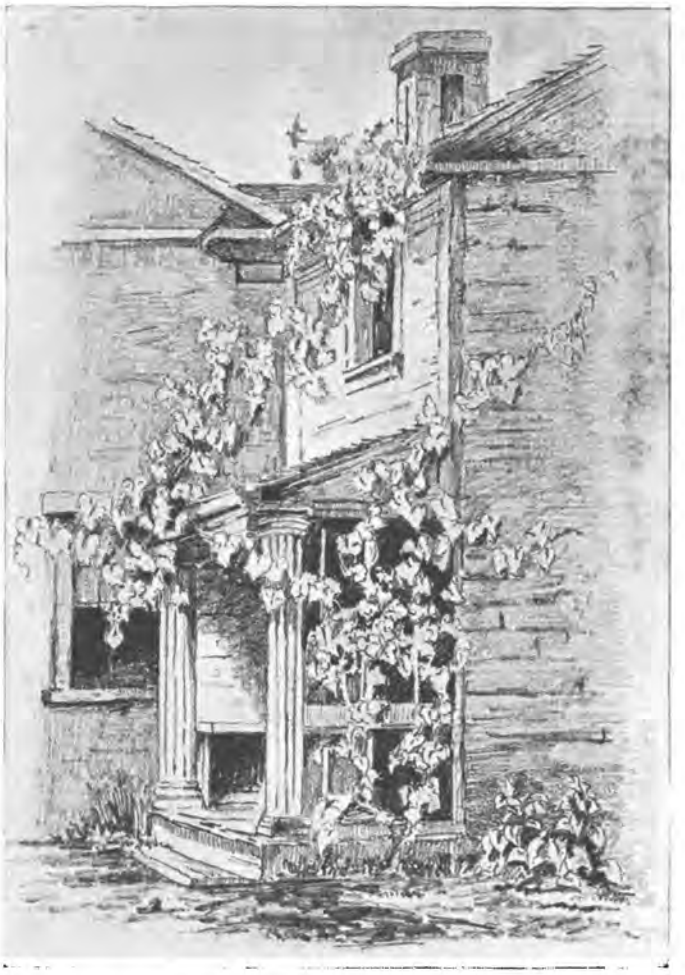
strivings to smother pride while staying with a maternal relative who had offered her a home for the winter while she was teaching in a small private school in Boston; and of her indignation when Mr. Fields said to her father, who had taken a story of hers to him to read with the hope that it might be accepted for the *Atlantic:* "Tell Louisa to stick to her teaching; she can never succeed as a writer!" This message, she said, made her exclaim to her father: "Tell him I will succeed as a writer, and some day I shall write for the *Atlantic!*" Not long afterward a story of hers was accepted by the *Atlantic* and a check for fifty dollars sent her. In telling me of this she said: "I called it my happy money, for with it I bought a second-hand carpet for our parlor, a bonnet for Anna, some blue ribbons for May, some shoes and stockings for myself, and put what was left into the Micawber Railroad, the Harold Skimpole Three Per Cents and the Alcott Sinking Fund."

One merry talk about the experiences of her girlhood and early womanhood, with several pathetic stories that she told me one moonlight summer evening, as we floated down the Concord River, made a profound impression, and I recall them with great distinctness.

"When I was a girl of eighteen or thereabouts," she said, "I had very fine dark brown hair, thick and long, almost touching the floor as I stood. At a time when the family needs were great, and discouragement weighed heavily upon us, I went to a barber, let down my hair, and asked him how much money he would give me for it. When he told me the sum, it seemed so large to me that I then and there determined I would part with my most precious possession if during the next week the clouds did not lift."

This costly gift, however, was not laid upon the family altar by the heroic girl. A friend, who was ever ready to extend an unobtrusive helping hand when it was needed, came to the rescue. Louisa, in relating this, said, "That was not the first time he had helped father, nor was it indeed the last."

Another incident that she told me that same evening in her inimitable way, with all its amusing and pathetic details, revealed to me how supreme was her loyalty and devotion to her family, and above all to her mother.



THE PORCH OF THE ORCHARD HOUSE.

From a Drawing by May Alcott Nieriker.

In 1850, when Louisa was eighteen years of age, Mrs. Alcott had, with the advice of friends, taken a position as visitor to the poor in Boston. She had also opened an intelligence office, where she often assisted gentlefolk, reduced from affluence to poverty, to situations where, without an entire sacrifice of pride, they could earn an honest independence. One day as Louisa was sitting in the office sewing on some flannel garments for the poor, under her mother's supervision, a tall man, evidently from his garb a clergyman, entered and said that he came to procure a companion for his invalid sister and aged father. He described the situation as a most desirable one, adding that the companion would be asked to read to them and perform the light duties of the household that had formerly devolved upon his sister, who was a martyr to neuralgia. The companion would be in every respect treated as one of the family, and all the comforts of home would be hers.

Mrs. Alcott, who, in spite of many bitter experiences in the past, never lost her faith in people and was rather too apt to take them for what they seemed to be, tried to think of some one who would be glad of so pleasant a home as described. She turned to Louisa and asked her if she could suggest any one. The reply came at once, "Only myself!" Great was her mother's surprise, and she exclaimed, "Do you really mean it, dear?" "I really do, if Mr. R—— thinks I would suit." The clergyman smiled and said, "I am sure you would, and I feel that if we can secure you, we shall be most fortunate."

When Mrs. Alcott had recovered from her surprise, she prudently asked him what wages would be paid. The smooth reply was that the word "wages" must not be used, but any one who lent youth and strength to a feeble household would be paid and well paid, and with another smile he took his leave. Then Mrs. Alcott asked, "Are you in earnest in engaging to go out for a month to live with these utter strangers?"

"Of course I am," said Louisa. "Why not try the experiment? It can but fail, as the teaching and sewing and acting and writing have. I do housework at home for love; why not there for money?"

"But you know, dear," her mother replied, "it is going out to service, even if you are called a companion."

"I don't care. Every kind of work that is paid for is service. It is rather a downfall to give up trying to be a Siddons or a Fanny Kemble, and become a servant at the beck and call of people; but what of it?" "All my highly respectable relatives," said Louisa, "held up their hands in holy horror when I left the paternal roof to go to my place of servitude, as they called it, and said, 'Louisa Alcott will disgrace her name by what she is doing.' But despite the lamentations and laughter of my sisters, I got my small wardrobe ready, and after embracing the family, with firmness started for my new home."

She had promised to stay four weeks; but, after a few days, she found that instead of being a companion to the invalid sister, who was a nonentity, while the father passed his days in a placid doze, she was called upon to perform the most menial services, made a mere household drudge, or, to use her own expression, "a galley slave." "Then," said she, "I pocketed my pride, looked the situation squarely in the face, and determined I would stay on to the bitter end. My word must be as good as my bond." By degrees all the hard work of the family was imposed upon her, for the sister was too feeble to help or even to direct in any way, and the servant was too old to do anything but the cooking, so that even the roughest work was hers. Having made up her mind to go when the month was over, she brought water from the well, dug paths in the snow, split kindlings, made fires, sifted ashes, and was in fact a veritable Cinderella. "But," said she, "I did sometimes rebel, and being a mortal worm, I turned now and then when the clergyman trod upon me, especially in the matter of boot-blacking, — that was too much for my good blood to bear! All the Mays, Sewalls, and Alcotts of the past and present appeared before my mind's eye; at blacking boots I drew the line and flatly refused. That evening I enjoyed the sinful spectacle of the reverend bootblack at the task. Oh, what a long month that was! And when I announced my intention of leaving at its end, such dismay fell upon the invalid sister, that I consented to remain until my mother could find a substitute. Three weeks longer I waited. Two other victims came, but soon left, and on departing called me a fool to stay another hour. I quite agreed with them, and when the third substitute came, clutched my possessions, and said I should go at once. The sister wept, the

father tremblingly expressed regret, and the clergyman washed his hands of the whole affair by shutting himself in his study. At the last moment, Eliza, the sister, nervously tucked a small pocket-book into my hand, and bade me good by with a sob. The old servant gave me a curious look as I went away, and exclaimed, 'Don't blame us for anything; some folks is liberal and some ain't!' So I left

THE WAYSIDE.

From a Drawing by May Alcott Nieriker.

the house, bearing in my pocket what I hoped was, if not a liberal, at least an honest return for seven weeks of the hardest work I ever did. Unable to resist the desire to see what my earnings were, I opened my purse — and beheld four dollars! I have had many bitter moments in my life, but one of the bitterest was then, when I stood in the road that cold, windy day, with my little pocket-book open, and

BUST OF MISS ALCOTT.

Made by Walton Ricketson for the Concord Library.

looked from my poor, chapped, grimy, chilblained hands to the paltry sum that had been considered enough to pay for the labor they had done. I went home, showed my honorable wounds, and told my tale to the sympathetic family. The four dollars were returned, and one of my dear ones would have shaken the minister, in spite of his cloth, had he crossed his path."

This experience of going out to service at eighteen made so painful an impression upon her that she rarely referred to it, and when she did so it was with heightened color and tearful eyes.

Long years before she wrote her story called "Transcendental Wild Oats," she had told me in her humorous way of the family experiences at "Fruitlands," as the community established by Mr. Alcott and his English friend, Mr. Lane, was called. In 1843, when Louisa was eleven years of age, these idealists went to the small town of Harvard, near Lancaster, Massachusetts, to carry out their theories. Mr. Lane was to be the patriarch of the colony of latter-day saints. Louisa, in speaking of her father's connection with this movement, said: "Father had a devout faith in the ideal. He wanted to live the highest, purest life, to plant a paradise where no serpent could enter. Mother was unconverted, but true as steel to him, following wherever his vagaries led, hoping that at last she might, after many wanderings, find a home for herself and children."

The diet at Fruitlands was strictly vegetarian; no milk, butter, cheese, or meat could be eaten or tasted even within the holy precincts — nothing that had caused death or wrong to man or beast. The garments must be of linen, because those made from wool were the result of the use of cruel shears to rob the sheep of their wool, and the covering of the silkworms must be despoiled to make silken ones. The bill of fare was bread, porridge, and water for breakfast; bread, vegetables, and water for dinner; bread, fruit, and water for supper. They had to go to bed with the birds, because candles, for conscientious reasons, could not be burnt, — the "inner light" must be all-sufficient; sometimes pine knots were used when absolutely necessary. Meanwhile, the philosophers sitting in the moonlight built with words a new heaven and a new earth, or in the starlight wooed the Oversoul, and lived amid metaphysical mists and philanthropic

pyrotechnics. Mr. Alcott revelled in the "Newness," as he was fond of calling their new life. He fully believed that in time not only Fruitlands, but the whole earth would become a happy valley, the Golden Age would come; and toward this end he talked, he prophesied, he worked with his hands; for *he* was in dead earnest, his was the enthusiasm of a soul too high for the rough usage of this workaday world.

In the mean while, with Spartan fortitude Mrs. Alcott bore the brunt of the household drudgery. How Louisa's eyes would twinkle as she described the strange methods at Fruitlands! "One day in autumn mother thought a northeast storm was brewing. The grain was ripe and must be gathered before the rain came to ruin it. Some call of the Oversoul had wafted all the men away, and so mother, Anna, a son of Mr. Lane's, and I must gather the grain in some way. Mother had it done with a clothes-basket and a stout Russia linen sheet. Putting the grain into the basket we emptied it upon the sheet, and taking hold of the four corners carried it to the barn."

May Alcott Nieriker.

During the summer Mr. Emerson visited them and wrote thus in his journal: —

"The sun and the sky do not look calmer than Alcott and his family at Fruitlands. They seem to have arrived at the fact — to have got rid of the show, and so are serene. Their manners and behavior in the house and in the field are those of superior men, — of men of rest. What had they to conceal? What had they to exhibit? And it seemed so high an attainment that I thought — as often before, so now more, because they had a fit home or the picture was fitly framed — that those men ought to be maintained in their place by the country for its culture. Young men and young maidens, old men and women, should visit them and be inspired. I think there is as much merit in beautiful manners as in hard work. I will not prejudge them successful. They look well in July; we will see them in December."

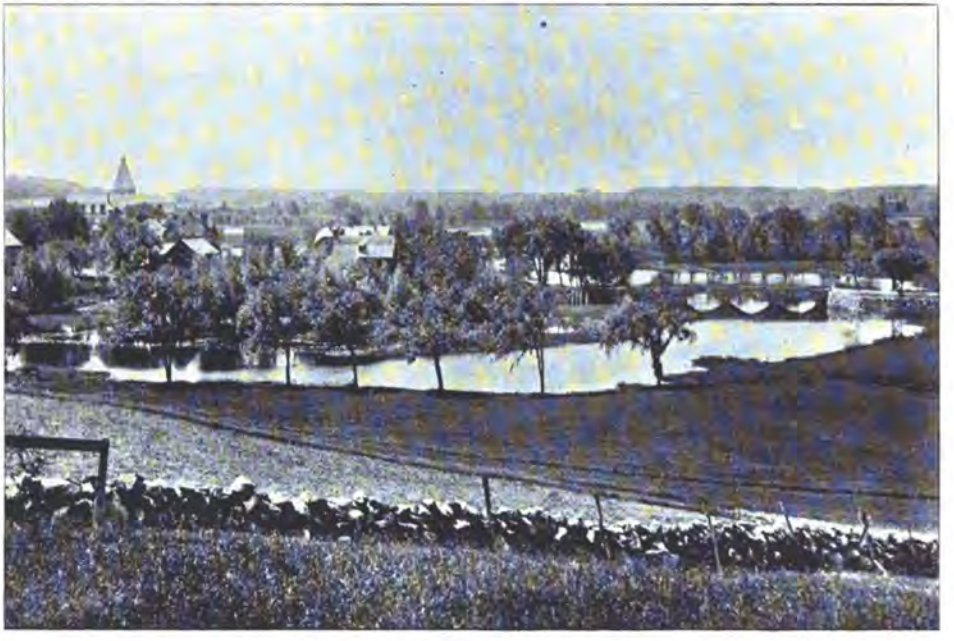
But alas! Emerson did not see the idealists in December. When the cold weather came on, the tragedy for the Alcott family began.

Some of those who had basked in the summer sunshine of the "Newness" fled to "fresh fields and pastures new" when the cold and dark days came. Mr. Lane, in whose companionship Mr. Alcott had enjoyed so much, left to join the Shakers, where he soon found the order of things reversed for him, as it was all work and no play with the brethren and sisters there. Mr. Alcott's strength and spirits were exhausted. He had assumed more than his share of responsibility,

MISS ALCOTT'S HOUSE AT NONQUITT.

and a heavy weight of suffering and debt was laid upon him. The experiment had ended in disastrous failure, — his Utopia had vanished into thin air. His strange theories had alienated many of his old friends; he was called a visionary, a fool, a madman, and some even called him unprincipled. What could he do for his family? Then it was that his wife, whose loyalty was supreme, whose good sense and

practical views of life had shown her from the beginning what would be the outcome of the experiment, then it was that her strong right arm rescued him. He was cherished with renewed love and tenderness by wife and children, who always remembered with pain this most bitter of all their experiences, and could never refer to it without weeping. Louisa, in recalling it, would say: "Mother fought down despondency and drove it from the household, and even wrested happiness from the hard hand of fate."



THE CONCORD RIVER.

After Mr. Alcott had rallied from the depression caused by the failure at Fruitlands, he went back to Concord with his family and worked manfully with his hands for their support; he also resumed his delightful conversations, which in those days of transcendentalism had become somewhat famous. When a young girl, I attended them with my mother at the house of the Unitarian clergyman in Lynn. The talks of Mr. Alcott and the conversations that followed were most

interesting — unlike anything that had been heard in Lynn or its vicinity in those days. Afterward, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thoreau used to come and give us in parlors "Lectures on Transcendentalism," as they were called.

The busy years rolled on for Louisa, who exerted herself to the utmost to be the family helper in sewing, teaching, and writing. After her stories were accepted by the *Atlantic*, it became for her smooth sailing. One day, as Mr. Alcott was calling upon Longfellow, the poet took up the last *Atlantic* and said, "I want to read to you Emerson's fine poem on Thoreau's Flute." As he began to read, Mr. Alcott interrupted him, exclaiming with delight, "My daughter Louisa wrote that!" In telling me of this, Louisa said, "Do you wonder that I felt as proud as a peacock when father came home and told me?" This occurred before the names of the writers were appended to their contributions to the magazine.

Bust of Alcott by Ricketson, in the Concord Library.

Miss Alcott made two visits to Europe, travelling quite extensively and meeting many distinguished people. She was always an ardent admirer of the writings of Dickens, and she had the great pleasure of meeting him in London and hearing him read. All the characters in his books were like household friends to her; she never tired of talking about and quoting him. Her impersonation of Mrs. Jarley was inimitable; and when I had charge of the representation of "The Old Curiosity Shop" at the Authors' Carnival held at Music Hall, in aid of the Old South Preservation

Fund, I was so fortunate as to persuade her to take the part of Mrs. Jarley in the waxwork show. It was a famous show, never to be forgotten. People came from all parts of New England to see Louisa Alcott's Mrs. Jarley, for she had for years been famous in the part whenever a deserving charity was to be helped in that way. Shouts of delight and peals of laughter greeted her original and witty descriptions of the "figgers" at each performance, and it was repeated every evening for a week.

No. 10 Louisburg Square, Boston.

One day during her last illness I received a note from her, in which she wrote: —

"A poor gentlewoman in London has written to me, because she thinks after reading my books that I loved Dickens's writings, and must have a kind heart and generous nature, and, therefore, takes the liberty to write and ask me to buy a letter written to her by Charles Dickens, who was a friend of hers. Such is her desperate need of money

that she must part with it, although it is very precious to her. She has fourteen children, and asks five pounds for the letter. Now, I don't want the letter, and am not well enough to see or even write to any one about buying it from her; will not you try and do it for me? 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.' I'll add something to whatever you get for it. Remember the poor thing has fourteen children, and has been reduced from affluence to poverty."

The letter could not be sold for the price named, nor indeed to any one at its proper value, so Miss Alcott returned it and sent the price asked for it by the next steamer. This is only one of the many generous acts of sympathy of which I knew.

The Alcotts were always anti-slavery people. Mrs. Alcott's brother, Samuel J. May, and her cousin, Samuel E. Sewall, were the stanchest supporters of Garrison in the early struggles. Mr. Alcott was the firm friend of that intrepid leader in the war against slavery. Nearly all the leading Abolitionists were their friends, — Lucretia Mott, the Grimké sisters, Theodore Weld, Lydia Maria Child, Wendell Phillips, Theodore Parker, Miss Peabody, and others of that remarkable galaxy of men and women who in those benighted years were ranked as fanatics by the community at large. When the mob spirit reigned in Boston and Garrison was taken to a jail in the city to protect him from its fury and save his life, Mr. and Mrs. Alcott were among the first to call upon him to express their sympathy.

When the war came, the Alcotts were stirred to a white heat of patriotism. Louisa wrote: —

"I am scraping lint for our boys in blue. My May blood is up. I must go to the front to nurse the poor helpless soldiers who are wounded and bleeding. I MUST GO, and good by if I never return."

She did go, and came very near losing her life; for while in the hospital she contracted a typhoid fever, was very ill, and never recovered from its effects; it can be truly said of her she gave her life to her country. One of her father's most beautiful sonnets was written in reference to this experience. He refers to her in this as "Duty's faithful child."

During her experience as a hospital nurse she wrote letters home and to the *Commonwealth* newspaper. From these letters a selection was made and published under the title of "Hospital Sketches." To me this is the most interesting and pathetic of all Miss Alcott's

books. With shattered health she returned to her writing and her home duties. Slowly but surely she won recognition; but it was not until she had written "Little Women," that full pecuniary success came.

Miss Alcott had the keenest insight into character. She was rarely mistaken in her judgment of people. She was intolerant of all shams, and despised pretentious persons. Often in her pleasant rooms at the Bellevue have I listened to her estimates of people whom we knew. She was sometimes almost ruthless in her denunciation of society, so called. I remember what she said as we sat together at a private ball, where many of the butterflies of fashion and leaders of society were assembled. As with her clear, keen eyes she viewed the pageant, she exclaimed: "Society in New York and in Boston, as we have seen it to-night, is corrupt. Such immodest dressing, such flirtations of some of these married women with young men whose mothers they might be, so far as age is concerned, such drinking of champagne — I loathe it all! If I can only live long enough I mean to write a book whose characters will be drawn from life. Mrs. —— [naming a person present] shall be prominent as the society leader, and the fidelity of the picture shall leave no one in doubt as to the original."

She always bitterly denounced all unwomanliness. Her standard of morality was a high one, and the same for men as for women. She was an earnest advocate of woman suffrage and college education for girls, because she devoutly believed that woman should do whatever she could do well, in church or school or state. When I was elected a member of the school committee of Melrose in 1874, she wrote:—

"I rejoice greatly thereat, and hope that the first thing that you and Mrs. Sewall propose in your first meeting will be to reduce the salary of the head master of the High School, and increase the salary of the first woman assistant, whose work is quite as good as his, and even harder; to make the pay equal. I believe in the same pay for the same good work. Don't you? In future let woman do whatever she can do; let men place no more impediments in the way; above all things let's have fair play, — let *simple justice* be done, say I. Let us hear no more of 'woman's sphere' either from our wise (?) legislators beneath the State House dome, or from our clergymen in their pulpits. I am tired, year after year, of hearing such twaddle about sturdy oaks and clinging vines and man's chivalric protection of woman. Let woman find out her own limitations, and if, as is so confidently asserted, nature has defined her sphere, she will be guided accordingly; but in heaven's name give her a chance! Let the professions be open to her; let fifty years of college education be hers, and then we shall see

what we shall see. Then, and not until then, shall we be able to say what woman can and what she cannot do, and coming generations will know and be able to define more clearly what is a 'woman's sphere' than these benighted men who now try to do it."

During Miss Alcott's last illness she wrote:—

"When I get upon my feet I am going (D. V.) to devote myself to settling poor souls who need a helping hand in hard times."

Many pictures and some busts have been made of Miss Alcott, but very few of them are satisfactory. The portrait painted in Rome by Healy is, I think, a very good one. The bas-relief by Walton Ricketson, her dear sculptor friend, is most interesting, and has many admirers. Ricketson has also made a bust of Mr. Alcott for the Concord Library, which is exceedingly good, much liked by the family, and so far as I know, by all who have seen it. Of the photographs of Miss Alcott only two or three are in the least satisfactory, notably the full-length one made by Warren many years ago, and also one by Allen and Rowell. In speaking of her pictures she once said, "When I don't look like the tragic muse, I look like a smoky relic of the Boston fire." Mr. Ricketson is now at work upon a bust of her, a photograph of which, from the clay, accompanies this article. In a letter to me in reply to one written after I had seen the bust in his studio at Concord, Mr. Ricketson writes:—

House on Dunreath Place, Boston, where Miss Alcott died.

"I feel deeply the important task I have to do in making this portrait, since it is to give form and expression to the broad love of humanity, the fixed purpose to fulfil her mission, the

womanly dignity, physical beauty, and queenly presence which were so perfectly combined in our late friend, and all so dominated by a fine intellectuality. To do this and satisfy a public that has formed somewhat an idea of her personal appearance is indeed a task worthy of the best effort. I certainly have some advantages to start with. The medallion from life modelled at Nonquitt in 1886, and at that time considered the best likeness of her, is invaluable, as the measurements are all accurate. I also have access to all the photographs, etc., of the family, and the criticisms of her sister, nephews, and friends, and my long and intimate acquaintance. I feel this to be the most important work I have as yet attempted. I intend to give unlimited time to it, and shall not consider it completed until the family and friends are fully satisfied. The success of the bust of the father leads me to hope for the same result in the one of his beloved daughter."

Miss Alcott always took a warm interest in Mr. Frank Elwell, the sculptor, and assisted him towards his education in art.

Miss Alcott had a keen sense of humor, and her friends recall with delight her sallies of wit and caustic descriptions of the School of Philosophy, the "unfathomable wisdom," the "metaphysical pyrotechnics," the strange vagaries of some of the devotees. She would sometimes enclose such nonsense rhymes as these to her intimate friends: —

"Philosophers sit in their sylvan hall
And talk of the duties of man,
Of Chaos and Cosmos, Hegel and Kant,
With the Oversoul well in the van;
All on their hobbies they amble away,
And a terrible dust they make;
Disciples devout both gaze and adore,
As daily they listen, and bake!"

The "sylvan hall" was, as I know from bitter experience while attending the sessions of the School of Philosophy, the hottest place in historic old Concord.

Sometimes Miss Alcott would bring her nonsense rhymes or "jingles," as she called them, to the club, and read at our pleasant club-teas, amid shouts of merriment followed by heartiest applause, such clever bits as the following: —

A WAIL UTTERED IN THE WOMAN'S CLUB.

God bless you, merry ladies,
May nothing you dismay,
As you sit here at ease and hark
Unto my dismal lay.

Get out your pocket-handkerchiefs,
Give o'er your jokes and songs,
Forget awhile your Woman's Rights,
And pity author's wrongs.

There is a town of high repute,
Where saints and sages dwell,
Who in these latter days are forced
To bid sweet peace farewell;
For all their men are demigods, —
So rumor doth declare, —
And all the women are De Staëls,
And genius fills the air.

So eager pilgrims penetrate
To their most private nooks,
Storm their back doors in search of news
And interview their cooks,
Worship at every victim's shrine,
See halos round their hats,
Embalm the chickweed from their yards,
And photograph their cats.

There's Emerson, the poet wise,
That much-enduring man,
Sees Jenkinses from every clime,
But dodges when he can.
Chaos and Cosmos down below
Their waves of trouble roll,
While safely in his attic locked,
He woos the Oversoul.

And Hawthorne, shy as any maid,
From these invaders fled
Out of the window like a wraith,
Or to his tower sped —
Till vanishing from this rude world,
He left behind no clue,
Except along the hillside path
The violet's tender blue.

Channing scarce dares at eventide
To leave his lonely lair;
Reporters lurk on every side
And hunt him like a bear.
Quaint Thoreau sought the wilderness,
But callers by the score
Scared the poor hermit from his cell,
The woodchuck from his door.

There's Alcott, the philosopher,
Who labored long and well
Plato's Republic to restore,
Now keeps a free hotel;
Whole boarding-schools of gushing girls
That hapless mansion throng,
And Young Men's Christian U-ni-ons,
Full five-and-seventy strong.

Alas! what can the poor souls do?
Their homes are homes no more;
No washing-day is sacred now;
Spring cleaning's never o'er.
Their doorsteps are the stranger's camp,
Their trees bear many a name,
Artists their very nightcaps sketch;
And this — and this is fame!

Deluded world! your Mecca is
A sand-bank glorified;
The river that you see and sing
Has "skeeters," but no tide.
The gods raise "garden-sarse" and milk
And in these classic shades
Dwell nineteen chronic invalids
And forty-two old maids.

Some April shall the world behold
Embattled authors stand,
With steel pens of the sharpest tip
In every inky hand.
Their bridge shall be a bridge of sighs,
Their motto, "Privacy";
Their bullets like that Luther flung
When bidding Satan flee.

Their monuments of ruined books,
Of precious wasted days,
Of tempers tried, distracted brains,
That might have won fresh bays.
And round this sad memorial,
Oh, chant for requiem:
Here lie our murdered geniuses;
Concord has conquered them.

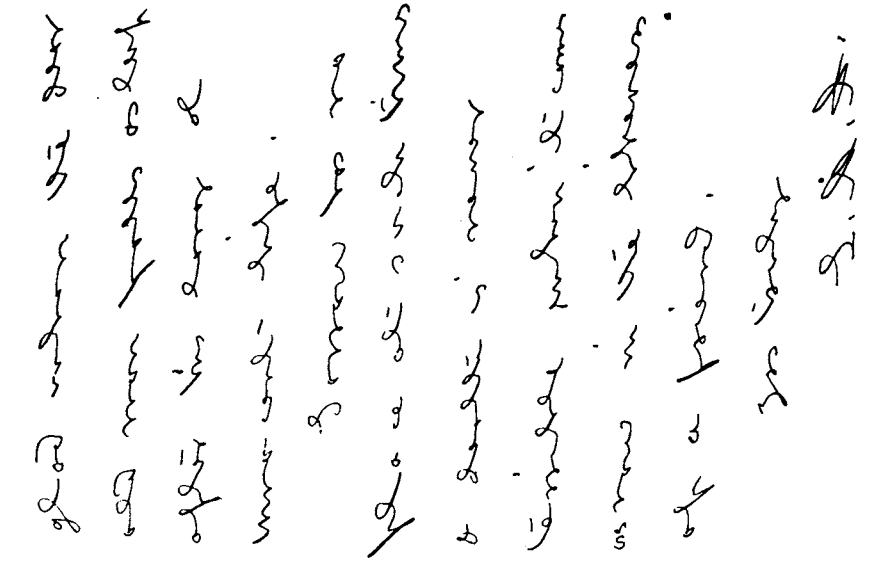
From the time that the success of "Little Women" established her reputation as a writer, until the last day of her life, her absolute devotion to her family continued. Her mother's declining years were

soothed with every care and comfort that filial love could bestow; she died in Louisa's arms, and for her she performed all the last offices of affection, — no stranger hands touched the beloved form. The most beautiful of her poems was written at this time, in memory of her mother, and was called, "Transfiguration." A short time after her mother's death, her sister May, who had married Mr. Ernest Nieriker, a Swiss gentleman, living in Paris, died after the birth of her child. Of this Louisa wrote me in reply to a letter of sympathy:—

"I mourn and mourn by day and night for May. Of all the griefs in my life, and I have had many, this is the bitterest. I try so hard to be brave, but the tears will come, and I go off and cry and cry; the dear little baby may comfort Ernest, but what can comfort us? May called her two years of marriage perfect happiness, and said: 'If I die when baby is born, don't mourn, for I have had in these two years more happiness than comes to many in a lifetime.' The baby is named for me, and is to be given to me as my very own. What a sad but precious legacy!"

The little golden-haired Lulu was brought to her by its aunt, Miss Sophie Nieriker, and she was indeed a great comfort to Miss Alcott for the remainder of her life.

In 1886, Miss Alcott took a furnished house on Louisburg Square in Boston, and although her health was still very delicate she anticipated much quiet happiness in the family life. In the autumn and winter she suffered much from indigestion, sleeplessness, and general debility. Early in December she told me how very much she was suffering, and added, "I mean if possible to keep up until after Christmas, and then I am sure I shall break down." When I went to carry her a Christmas gift, she showed me the Christmas tree, and seemed so bright and happy that I was not prepared to hear soon after that she had gone out to the restful quiet of a home in Dunreath Place, at the Highlands, where she could be tenderly cared for under the direction of her friend, Dr. Rhoda Lawrence, to whom she dedidated one of her books. She was too weak to bear even the pleasurable excitement of her own home, and called Dr. Lawrence's house, "Saint's Rest." The following summer she went with Dr. Lawrence to Princeton, but on her return in the autumn her illness took an alarming character, and she was unable to see her friends, and only occasionally the members of her family. On her last birthday, November 29, she received many gifts, and as I had remembered her, the follow-



A PORTION OF MISS ALCOTT'S LAST LETTER.

ing characteristic letter came to me, the last but one that she sent me: —

"Thanks for the flowers and for the kind thought that sent them to the poor old exile. I had seven boxes of flowers, two baskets, and three plants, forty gifts in all, and at night I lay in a room that looked like a small fair, with its five tables covered with pretty things, borders of posies, and your noble roses towering in state over all the rest. That red one was so delicious that I revelled in it like a big bee, and felt it might almost do for a body — I am so thin now. Everybody was very kind, and my solitary day was made happy by so much love. Illness and exile have their bright side, I find, and I hope to come out in the spring a gay old butterfly. My rest-and-milk-cure is doing well, and I am an obedient oyster since I have learned that patience and time are my best helps."

THE ALCOTT LOT IN SLEEPY HOLLOW CEMETERY, CONCORD.

In February, 1888, Mr. Alcott was taken with what proved to be his last illness. Louisa knew that the end was near, and as often as she was able came into town to see him. On Thursday morning, March 2, I chanced to be at the house, where I had gone to inquire for Mr. Alcott and Louisa. While talking with Mrs. Pratt, her sister, the door opened, and Louisa, who had come in from the Highlands to see her father, entered. I had not seen her for months, and the sight of her thin, wan face and sad look shocked me, and I felt for the first

time that she was hopelessly ill. After a few affectionate words of greeting she passed through the open doors of the next room. The scene that followed was most pathetic. There lay the dear old father, stricken with death, his face illumined with the radiance that comes but once, — with uplifted gaze he heeded her not. Kneeling by his bedside, she took his hand, kissed it and placed in it the pansies she had brought, saying, "It is Weedy" (her pet name). Then after a moment's silence she asked, "What are you thinking of, dear?" He replied, looking upward, "Up there; you come too!" Then with a kiss she said, "I wish I could go," bowing her head as if in prayer. After a little came the "Good by," the last kiss, and like a shadow she glided from the room. The following day I wrote her at the "Saint's Rest," enclosing a photograph of her sister May, that I found among some old letters of her own. Referring to my meeting with her the day before, I said: —

"I hope you will be able to bear the impending event with the same brave philosophy that was yours when your dear mother died."

She received my note on Saturday morning, together with one from her sister. Early in the morning she replied to her sister's note, telling of a dull pain and a weight like iron on her head. Later, she wrote me the last words she ever penned; and in the evening came the fatal stroke of apoplexy, followed by unconsciousness. Her letter to me was a follows: —

"DEAR MRS. PORTER, — Thanks for the picture. I am very glad to have it. No philosophy is needed for the impending event. I shall be very glad when the dear old man falls asleep after his long and innocent life. Sorrow has no place at such times, and death is never terrible when it comes as now in the likeness of a friend.

"Yours truly,

"L. M. A.

"P. S. I have another year to stay in my 'Saint's Rest,' and then I am promised twenty years of health. I don't want so many, and I have no idea I shall see them. But as I don't live for myself, I hold on for others, and shall find time to die some day, I hope."

Mr. Alcott died on Sunday morning, March 4, and on Tuesday morning, March 6, death, "in the likeness of a friend," came to Louisa. Mr. Alcott's funeral took place on Tuesday morning, and many of the friends there assembled were met with the tidings of Louisa's death. Miss Alcott had made every arrangement for her funeral. It

was her desire that only those near and dear to her should be present, that the service should be simple, and that only friends should take part. The services were indeed simple, but most impressive. Dr. Bartol, the lifelong friend of the family, paid a loving and simple tribute to her character, as did Mrs. Livermore. Mrs. Cheney read the sonnet written by Mr. Alcott, which refers to her as "Duty's faithful child." Mrs. Harriet Winslow Sewall, a very dear cousin, read with her sweet voice and in a tender manner that most beautiful of Louisa's poems, "Transfiguration," written in memory of her mother. I had carried my simple tribute of verse, but could not control voice or emotion sufficiently to read it, and laid it with a bunch of white Cherokee roses on the casket.