

58 QUOTATIONS



Louisa May Alcott

(1832-1888)

Louisa May Alcott wrote *Little Women* (1868,1869), one of the most popular classics in world literature. She also wrote many lesser books, portraying both traditional and independent women—the New Woman—in a variety of roles. Alcott was both a Victorian feminist and a modern Feminist, wanting the best of both paradigms. Advocating an impossibility, she insists on the liberation of women from Victorian constraints while maintaining a Victorian posture toward males, as in *Little Men* (1871)—that is, women should be liberated but men should not. She complained about being edited by her publisher, yet she later censored *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) in Concord. Alcott never married and her attitudes toward men may have derived in some measure from her disillusionment with her father Bronson Alcott, a dreamy utopian socialist who subjected his family to many disappointments.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, education, society, character, aspiration, writing, fame, friendship, woman, love, Victorianism, modern Feminism, faith in self-reliance, utopianism, literature, condemns Mark Twain, advice, death:

YOUTH

Poor dull Concord. Nothing colorful has come through here since the Redcoats.

EDUCATION

I consider it the best part of an education to have been born and brought up in the country.

Seeking with hand and heart / The teacher whom she learned to love / Before she knew 'twas Art.

Life is my college. May I graduate well, and earn some honors!

SOCIETY

People don't have fortunes left them—nowadays; men have to work, and women to marry for money. It's a dreadfully unjust world.

Money is the root of all evil, and yet it is such a useful root that we cannot get on without it any more than we can without potatoes.

Many argue; not many converse.

CHARACTER

A little kingdom I possess, where thoughts and feelings dwell; / And very hard the task I find of governing it well.

I am more than half-persuaded that I am a man's soul, put by some freak of nature into a woman's body—because I have fallen in love in my life with so many pretty girls and never once the least bit with any man.

Now I am beginning to live a little and feel less like a sick oyster at low tide.

I'm not afraid of storms, for I'm learning how to sail my ship.

ASPIRATION

Resolve to take fate by the throat and shake a living out of her.

I will make a battering-ram of my head and make my way through this rough and tumble world.

I do not ask for any crown / But that which all may win; / Nor try to conquer any world / Except the one within.

Far away there in the sunshine are my highest aspirations. I may not reach them, but I can look up and see their beauty, believe in them, and try to follow where they lead.

WRITING

[P]ublishers are very perverse & won't let authors have their way so my little women must grow up & be married off in a very stupid style.

My book came out; and people began to think that topsy-turvy Louisa would amount to something after all.

If all literary women had such thoughtful angels for husbands, they would live longer and write more. Perhaps that wouldn't be such a blessing to the world though, as most of us write too much now.

Talent isn't genius, and no amount of energy can make it so. I want to be great, or nothing.

I think my natural ambition is for the lurid style.

[I write] moral pap for the young.

FAME

Fame is a pearl many dive for and only a few bring up. Even when they do, it is not perfect, and they sigh for more, and lose better things in struggling for them.

FRIENDSHIP

A faithful friend is a strong defense; and he that hath found him hath found a treasure.

“Stay” is a charming word in a friend’s vocabulary.

WOMAN

Housekeeping ain’t no joke.

Girls are so queer you never know what they mean. They say No when they mean Yes, and drive a man out of his wits for the fun of it.

She had a womanly instinct that clothes possess an influence more powerful over many than the worth of character or the magic of manners.

LOVE

It takes two flints to make a fire.

Love is a great beautifier.

VICTORIANISM

The great charm of all power is modesty.

Happy is the son whose faith in his mother remains unchallenged.

What do girls do who haven’t any mothers to help them through their troubles?

The power of finding beauty in the humblest things makes home happy and life lovely.

Father asked us what was God’s noblest work. Anna said men, but I said babies. Men are often bad, but babies never are.

Simple, sincere people seldom speak much of their piety. It shows itself in acts rather than in words, and has more influence than homilies or protestations.

We all have our own life to pursue, our own kind of dream to be weaving, and we all have the power to make wishes come true, as long as we keep believing.

Work is and always has been my salvation and I thank the Lord for it.

Help one another is part of the religion of our sisterhood.

MODERN FEMINISM

I asked for bread, and I got a stone in the shape of a pedestal.

Women have been called queens for a long time, but the kingdom given them isn’t worth ruling.

Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman’s life.

I believe that it is as much a right and duty for women to do something with their lives as for men and we are not going to be satisfied with such frivolous parts as you give us.

I put in my list all the busy, useful independent spinsters I know, for liberty is a better husband than love to many of us.

Now we are expected to be as wise as men who have had generations of all the help there is, and we scarcely nothing.

Let my name stand among those who are willing to bear ridicule and reproach for the truth's sake, and so earn some right to rejoice when the victory is won.

FAITH IN SELF-RELIANCE

I like women to help themselves, as that is, in my opinion, the best way to settle the woman question. Whatever we can do and do well we have a right to do, and I don't think any one will deny us.

UTOPIANISM

My definition [of a philosopher] is of a man [like her father] up in a balloon, with his family and friends holding the ropes which confine him to earth and trying to haul him down.

Rapidly rumors of the new experiment went abroad, causing many strange spirits to flock thither, for in those days communities were the fashion and transcendentalism raged wildly.... Brother Lion domineered over the whole concern; for, having put the most money into the speculation, he was resolved to make it pay... Abel Lamb simply reveled in the Newness, firmly believing that his dream was to be beautifully realized and in time not only little Fruitlands, but the whole earth, be turned into a Happy Valley.... It was little remarkable that only one woman ever joined this community. Mrs. Lamb merely followed wheresoever her husband led,—“as ballast for his balloon,” as she said, in her bright way.

LITERATURE

Good books, like good friends, are few and chosen; the more select, the more enjoyable.

It takes people a long time to learn the difference between talent and genius, especially ambitious young men and women.

There is not much danger that real talent or goodness will be overlooked long; even if it is, the consciousness of possessing and using it well should satisfy one.

It takes very little fire to make a great deal of smoke nowadays, and notoriety is not real glory.

CONDEMNS MARK TWAIN

If Mr. Clemens cannot think of something better to tell our pure-minded lads and lasses, he had better stop writing for them. [Censors *Huckleberry Finn* for Concord Public Library, sounding like Miss Watson]

ADVICE

Have regular hours for work and play; make each day both useful and pleasant, and prove that you understand the worth of time by employing it well. Then youth will be delightful, old age will bring few regrets, and life will become a beautiful success.

Do the things you know, and you shall learn the truth you need to know.

He who believes is strong; he who doubts is weak.

Strong convictions precede great actions.

DEATH

Love is the only thing that we can carry with us when we go, and it makes the end go easy.

