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Little Women Abroad The Alcott Sisters' Letters from Europe 1870-1871

Louisa May Alcott
May Alcott
Daniel Shealy, editor
University of Georgia (August 2008)
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The prolonged visit to Europe was a rite of passage for well-educated and well-to-do Americans, and the numbers undertaking it swelled after the Civil War. A voluminous literature of reportage resulted. After Louisa, then thirty-eight and celebrated as the author of *Little Women* (1868), made a visit with her sister May in 1870-71, she used their letters as the basis for a well-informed report, published in 1872 as *Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag, Volume 2: Shawl Straps*. Louisa burned the letters in 1885; fortunately Bronson Alcott had made copies. Thus, Daniel Shealy, a seasoned Alcott specialist, has been able to give us this unusual primary account, enhanced by seventy-eight illustrations; of them forty (mainly travel scenes) are by May Alcott, a trained and accomplished artist.

The sisters' letters are a delight; they had splendid introductions, met many notables, and were fueled by curiosity. Their journey through France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and Belgium, ending in London, was not without incident. The Franco-Prussian War, floods in Rome, and smallpox on board ship meant the journey was not the rest-cure that Louisa, the overworked novelist, had expected.
PETER SKINNER (January 9, 2009)

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