

## An American Family

MAY ALCOTT: A Memoir. By CAROLINE TICKNOR. Boston: Little, Brown & Company. 1928.

Reviewed by HONORÉ WILLIS MORROW  
Author of "Father of Little Women"

MAY ALCOTT was the Amy of "Little Women," the youngest of the children of Bronson and Abba May Alcott. She was petted and protected by the older girls and her parents and so knew less of the hard grind of poverty than they and was robbed of some of her spiritual birthright thereby. Miss Ticknor has allowed May to draw her own portrait, by giving us the long correspondence between May and her mother, when May went abroad, and Louise adds a good many subtle touches in her diary, where there are numerous references to her struggle to give May the pretty clothing, the educational and social opportunities which the younger sister craved.

One gets a vivid picture of a tall blonde girl, not pretty but with dash and style and a spontaneity of wit that is decidedly attractive. Selfish, yes, and too willing to accept sacrifices on the part of Anna (Meg) and Louisa. But, like a good many selfish people, so appreciative and so grateful—after the sacrifice has been made—so free in denunciation of her own grasping, that one forgives and loves her the more.

Miss Ticknor presents May's story practically without embellishment and with no attempt to interpret. The book is the more effective for that. Through the childish diaries we watch the growth of the very human little girl into the talented woman. We follow her to Europe with Louisa, wishing somehow that "Marmee" might have had the tour before May took her turn. And then with unqualified sympathy and interest we read May's fine letters to her mother describing her work, her growing successes, and, finally, Ernst whom she is to love and marry, despite the fact that he is so much her junior. Her death after the birth of her baby daughter and the coming of the baby to America to be Louisa's child is told with exquisite poignancy by quotations from Louisa's diary.

One finishes Miss Ticknor's book with the feeling that she has made a solid contribution to our conception of one of our few really important American families: important because they expressed the best of the early American type. For you can't barge about for several years among the letters and diaries of the New Englanders of the two generations represented by the Alcotts without realizing that they do portray the type of thought and endeavor that gave us whatever intellectual or spiritual distinction we had or have among nations. And that like those other "big chiefs," the Indian and the buffalo, they have slipped over the horizon forever.

It seems to me that it is as one of a family that we ought to think of Louisa May Alcott. For as the precious records so long cherished in the old Thoreau house in Concord are placed within the editor's reach, we realize that the father, the mother, and the other sisters were of as rare and fine a flavor as Louisa. More than that, while most of the other mental giants of that day, as Emerson, Webster, and the Adamses, also had families, the Alcott family alone survives for us as an entity. This is partly because Bronson handed on his genius to his children, which is more than was done by Webster or Emerson, and partly because he taught his children how to record themselves on paper, then cherished these records and left them for the future to recognize and value.

And so we are getting the rounded picture to which Miss Ticknor has added another figure.

They were not at all a democratic family. They believed in an aristocracy; the aristocracy of brains. You could be a lady and wear mended gloves or no gloves. But you couldn't be a lady and speak bad English. An adequate education was more important than sufficient food or clothing: not merely the three R's, but something that smacked of true scholarship. Poverty was uncomfortable in the degree to which it distracted one's attention from things of the mind and spirit. People who sought money for money's sake belonged to the outer pale.

Next in importance to intellectuality ranked simple goodness expressed not so much in concrete religion as in a frank everyday struggle to be something more than decent: kindness, sweet temper,

charitableness, industry, cheerfulness. Without these homely virtues, one's intellect was warped. Nor did one struggle to acquire them secretly. One talked and wrote about them as a matter of intense and common interest.

The third ideal peculiar to this early American group was its sense of responsibility for the political standards of the country. This had little to do with factions, but everything to do with the varied interpretations of the Constitution which was still so new that people were perpetually conscious of it as a way of life. The Websters, the Emersons, the Adamses, the Alcotts, and all their kind were determined that the self-seeking, loud-mouthed politicians should not be permitted to make interpretations that would be crystallized into the customs of the country. And so they thought and talked and wrote a great deal about the philosophy of government. Mrs. Alcott's unpublished letters to her brother who was a Unitarian clergyman are full of intelligent comment, often biting, always constructive, on many of the organic laws as the Congress turned them out. She saw to it that her children understood them, too, and argued about them with her neighbors.

So it is that these families whose intellectuality had freed them from the narrowness of Puritanism without losing one iota of its chastity of thought or motive were extraordinarily important to America's beginnings. What their significance was in detail, how much we owe them, what we are losing that they gave, it is the job of a different kind of biography to show.

It has been the accepted practice for the biographer to choose the distinguished member of such a



Oliver Herford's view of Hearst as an office seeker. "The Yellow Peril," from *Life*, August 17, 1922.  
From "Hearst," by John K. Winkler (Simon & Schuster).

family and write his public story. Usually, alas, he has been restricted for lack of material from pursuing any other method. But with the Alcotts a new attack is possible. After all, in the last analysis, a nation is only a vast collection of families and its truest history would be told in terms of family. And if we want to discover why we are not English or German or French let someone write a rounded account of all the Alcotts. It will contain the very finest essence of Americanism.

## Lincoln's Wife

MARY TODD LINCOLN: AN APPRECIATION. By HONORÉ WILLIS MORROW. New York: William Morrow. 1928. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

MRS. MORROW'S interesting book unites with the recent publication of Dr. William E. Barton, "The Women Whom Lincoln Loved," to fill a gap which has existed for an astonishing period. Research upon Lincoln has attained the proportions of a vast flood. No episode in his life is too minute to receive exhaustive attention. Yet until now his wife, the mother of his four sons, has been totally neglected. When Mrs. Morrow began her inquiries, she found almost nothing authentic in print concerning Mary Todd Lincoln. Nicolay and Hay had barely mentioned her; diaries, autobiographies, and histories dealing with the period passed her over almost in silence. Only one magazine article had been printed concerning her. The outstanding exception to the rule of neglect was furnished by the inaccurate and malicious biography of Lincoln by his law partner Herndon, or rather that written from Herndon's materials by Jesse Weik; and this treated Mrs. Lincoln with gross unfairness. Gossip, based partly on the Weik-Herndon strictures and partly on prejudiced tales set afloat during the Civil War, had long represented her as a shrew, loud-tongued, narrow-minded,

jealous, and subject to "tantrums" of anger in which she literally rolled on the White House carpet.

Pursuing her researches, gathering a line here and a page there, Mrs. Morrow arrived at the conclusion that Mary Todd Lincoln was "one of the most lied-about women in the world"; and that, far from being an unmanageable vixen, she was a long-suffering, noble, and likable woman. She has written this volume to present her view. Let it be said at once that she by no means elevates Mrs. Lincoln to saintliness. Her book shows that she was vain, flirtatious, and capricious; that she made a peppery and captious wife, whose temper at one time actually did prevent Lincoln from spending his evenings at home; that her extravagance in dress, while she was in the White House, piled up a perfect nightmare of debt; and that her weakness after Lincoln's death, when she consented to a public auction of some of her effects, brought her terrible and not wholly undeserved humiliation. Yet Mrs. Morrow does succeed in proving that she was a remarkable and in many ways an admirable person, and that she played a great rôle in Lincoln's career.

She was remarkable, to begin with, in that she was an exceptionally cultivated daughter of the frontier. Reared at Lexington, Ky., near Clay's home, in a community of well-to-do and well-bred people of Virginia blood, she was privately tutored in languages and attended an academy which attracted even Northern pupils. She spoke and read French with facility—which was one reason why when mistress of the White House she was a favorite of the diplomatic corps. She appreciated good books, and became known in Springfield for her literary taste. She was remarkable, again, in her ambition. It was a more steadfast and intense ambition than Lincoln's, it aimed at higher goals—her refusal to let him accept the governorship of Washington Territory is well known—and it stimulated her husband to keep up the struggle for recognition when he might have sunk into a comfortable law practice. "Until 1858," Henry B. Rankin, who studied in Lincoln's office, has testified, "he needed influences outside himself to push him to the political front and hold him there. She gave him this unstintingly." Unquestionably she was a little impatient and nagging when he seemed indolent or fell into one of his deep spells of silent melancholy; but whatever her methods, she did thrust him forward. She was remarkable, too, in her intense likes and dislikes. With her cutting tongue she could and did make enemies; Herndon was one, Secretary Chase was another. She thought McClellan "a humbug" because "he talks so much and does so little;" she told Lincoln that Grant was a "butcher," and she bitterly opposed the appointment of Andrew Johnson as military governor of Tennessee, telling Lincoln that he would "rue the day." Plainly she was a woman of perception. Plainly, too, she had qualities that were a useful complement to the great gifts of her immortal husband.

Mrs. Morrow's book contains much that is appealing, much that is informative, and one bit of narrative that is genuinely tragic. This is the essay which traces Mrs. Lincoln's sad and shabby career from the assassination in 1865 to her death in 1882. It were better if she too had died at Booth's hand. She had piled up an incredible debt for finery, chiefly at A. T. Stewart's New York store—a total of \$27,000. The President had saved little. Congress granted her \$23,000, the remainder sum of Lincoln's salary for the year 1865. After paying part of her debts, and placing Robert in a law office in Chicago, she found that she had, as she complained to a friend, "not the means to meet the expenses of even a first-class boarding-house." In confusion rather than desperation, she made the ghastly error of giving a New York auctioneer some jewelry, dresses, shawls, and other possessions to sell publicly, at the same time issuing an ill-tempered letter in which she denounced Seward, Thurlow Weed, Henry J. Raymond, and others for frowning upon a plan to raise money for her by voluntary subscription. The result was a chorus of gibes and sneers from the Radical Republican and Democratic newspapers. The *Cleveland Herald* accused her of plundering the White House of \$100,000 worth of furnishings; Thurlow Weed publicly asserted that she had sold eleven of Lincoln's new linen shirts before his dead body had left Washington for Springfield. Senator Charles Sumner, always a staunch friend to Lincoln and to her, came to her rescue, and introduced a bill in Congress for a Federal



pension. There was another chorus of derision and denunciation, in which Congressmen and editors commingled their howls. Yates of Illinois declared that she had sympathized with the South and given treacherous aid to the enemy—an old wartime lie. Edmunds of Vermont was implacable in his opposition. Not until 1870, and then ungraciously, reluctantly, and by the close vote of 24 to 20, did the Senate consent to a meagre \$3,000 pension for Abraham Lincoln's widow—at this time living in what approached indigence. She did not suffer from poverty the rest of her days; but ill health and the loss of her beloved Tad made them unhappy.

Mrs. Morrow has added a useful book to the literature upon Lincoln. Its form is not happy, for it alternates plain essays in biography with bits of fiction in a disconcerting way. A final good-measure essay on "Some Popular Fallacies About Lincoln" is not wholly successful. For example, she denies that Lincoln told risqué stories, partly, it appears, on the ground that nobody has ever repeated any of them to her! In this matter an ounce of good positive evidence is worth a pound of negative evidence, and the direct testimony of various men—for example, Henry Villard in his "Memoirs," Vol. I, p. 94—is irrefutable. But the book fully achieves the author's intention of vindicating Mary Lincoln against baseless slanders, and of presenting a full, accurate, vivacious portrait of her.

## Ancient Greece

### THE CAMBRIDGE ANCIENT HISTORY.

Edited by J. B. Bury, S. A. Cook, and F. E. Adcock. Vol. V. Athens, 478-401 B. C. \$7. Vol. VI. Macedon, 401-301 B. C. \$9.50. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1927.

Reviewed by M. ROSTOV'TZEFF  
Yale University

**I**N my last review of the "Cambridge Ancient History" I was still asking the question for whom it was written and whether the book was a success. My queries are now definitely solved. It is a success both from the commercial and from the scientific point of view. It has found its public: they are teachers of ancient history both in England and in the United States, younger scholars and the like. And for all who are using it, it is a great help: its lucid presentation of facts and problems, its sound and not exaggerated critical point of view, its measured and perfectly adequate judgment of men (individuals and groups) and their actions, its excellent up-to-date bibliographies, chronological tables, maps, indexes, and last but not least its copious and excellent illustrations (a special volume gives a set of first-class plates which reproduce the most important monuments of the ancient Orient) make it both a pleasure and a relief to use the book when one wants first-hand information on the facts and problems of Ancient History.

The first three volumes of the work were somewhat chaotic in their composition, the contributors varying widely in their manner of presentation, in their style, and method of treatment. It was inevitable in a field so little investigated from the historical point of view, so unevenly illuminated by our sources, so little connected in the interrelations of its various parts. With the fourth volume, which covered the period of the Persian Empire, of the rise of Greece, and of the beginning of the conflict between Persia and Greece, the task of the editors and of the contributors became easier and the flow of their narrative better coordinated. Of course in treating the history of Greece at this period it is easy to take the history of Athens and of Sparta for the history of Greece. However, the editors and the authors of the various chapters on the history of Greece have done their best to avoid this inevitable distortion of proportions. With the help of inscriptions and of archaeological material it is nowadays much easier to see the variety of historical life in the various parts of Greece.

Still easier than in the fourth volume was the coordination of material in the fifth, which is devoted to the history of Greece after the Persian War and culminates in the history of the Peloponnesian War. As in the earlier volumes of the "Cambridge Ancient History," the various subjects treated in this latter volume are distributed among various scholars. This system has its merits and its drawbacks. I understand that the history of Greece after the Persian and before the Peloponnesian war is treated by one man, the Peloponnesian war by another. But I fail to understand why the Peloponnesian war

should be treated by two different authors however congenial they may be.

The history of the fifth century B. C. is generally acknowledged to be a field in which Oxford and Cambridge men excel. Every don in these universities is a specialist in this period of Greek history, since the teaching of classics in Oxford and Cambridge is concentrated on the so-called classical period of Athens. No wonder therefore that almost all the contributors to this volume are Oxford and Cambridge men. The economic background of the fifth century is explained in a masterful way by Marcus N. Tod (Oxford), one of the masters of Greek epigraphy. The political history of 478-445, the structure of the Delian confederacy, and the leading features of the Periclean democracy are chronicled in a beautiful style and with many acute and new remarks by E. M. Walker, a figure well known to all who know Oxford and are interested in the history of fifth-century Athens. Attic drama in the fifth century is the subject of a chapter contributed by J. T. Sheppard of Cambridge (I wonder why when an English scholar comes to treat literature his style becomes at once involved, pompous, florid, and sometimes little-intelligible). The story of Western Greece is set forth by R. Hackforth of Cambridge. With chapter VII begins the history of the Peloponnesian war. The first part of it is told by F. E. Adcock, one of the editors of the "Cambridge Ancient History," and the second by W. S. Ferguson (Harvard). The latter is the only contributor to the volume who is not an Oxford or Cambridge man, and his presence in it is a great tribute not only to his scholarship but to American scholarship in general.

The chapters of Adcock and of Ferguson are the climax of the volume. I have rarely read as masterful a presentation of this decisive and tragic episode in the history of the ancient world. Both scholars recognize the mistakes and the dark sides of Athenian democracy. However, they never exaggerate. Their own sympathy is with Athens and with democracy. Again and again they point out the great heroism of Athens in times of distress and the fervent love of the Athenians for their city. Was it an historical necessity that Athenian democracy should have created the greatest civilization in world history and the worst possible form of government as regards foreign policy? The late J. B. Bury, whose death is a tremendous loss to the study of ancient history, concludes the history of the Peloponnesian war by sketching the intellectual background of it—the main lines of the age of Illumination (the Sophists and Socrates). The volume ends with an excellent characterization of Herodotus and Thucydides, by R. W. Macan, whose leadership in this field is generally recognized, and with a masterful chapter on Greek Art and Architecture by the new professor of Art and Archaeology at Oxford, J. D. Beazley (sculpture and painting) and D. S. Robertson, Cambridge (architecture). It is a real pleasure to read Beazley's chapters: his analysis of the progress of ancient sculpture, his remarks on the sculptures of Olympia and those of the Parthenon are real jewels all the more to be appreciated when the volume of illustrations is before the eyes of the reader.

Volume VI deals with the political decay of Greece, with the revival of Persia, and with the rise of Macedon. I do not object to the inclusion in this volume of the chapters on Judaea, by S. A. Cook, and on Egypt, by H. R. Hall, (though I do not regard them as necessary), but I regret that their inclusion prevented the editors from introducing many more necessary chapters into the volume. I miss bitterly a chapter on the economic background of the history of Greece in the fourth century. We have remarks on it interwoven into the various chapters on political history, but we have no general picture of evolution, no comparison between the conditions of the fifth and those of the fourth century. Nor do I find in any of the chapters but that on Egypt an adequate characterization of the tremendous expansion of Greek civilization to the West and to the East in the fourth century. For the West the gap will be, let us hope, filled by an adequate treatment in the subsequent volumes on the pre-Roman civilization of the Samnites (especially Campania), that of Central Italy (including Rome), and that of Etruria in the fifth and fourth centuries. For the East, I am afraid, it will not be possible any more adequately to characterize the hellenization of many parts of Asia Minor in the

fourth century (e. g., the kingdom of Mausolus). And last but not least there is no chapter on the early evolution of the northern neighbors of Greece, those Illyrians, Thracians, and Celts who loom so large in the political history of the fourth century and appear in the "Cambridge Ancient History" quite as suddenly as Athena out of the head of Zeus. To take up the early history of these nations in connection with the Roman conquest is a method both antiquated and inefficient. In the history of the intellectual life of Greece in the fourth century I miss bitterly a chapter on Greek oratory, as important a creation of the Greek genius of the fourth century as the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.

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Let me, however, deal with what we have in this volume, not with what we miss. The chapters on political history are as excellent as those of volume V, especially those of Dr. M. Cary and those of W. W. Tarn. The new orientation of Greek history during the ascendancy of Sparta, the short period of life of the Athenian League, and the Theban hegemony, is excellently illustrated and explained in a new way and by new methods by Dr. Cary. Two interesting chapters on Macedon and Philip are contributed by A. W. Pickard, Cambridge. Most attractive are the chapters of W. W. Tarn on Persia of the fourth century and on the events of the age of Alexander. Tarn has shown with full evidence that Persia was not at all a "negligible quantity," but was as strong and rich as in the fourth century. Earlier, had it not been for the personal defects of Darius, the task of Alexander would have been still more difficult than it actually was. The story of Alexander is told in a fascinating way, his character explained and his aims stated with great intuition. It is the best history of Alexander I have ever read in spite of the fact that I do not agree with many a statement of the author. There is a little too much of intuition in defining the leading motives of Alexander and in describing him as a pioneer, not only in military affairs, but also in the general conception of the world and of the relations between men. I must mention in describing the part devoted to political history that the last literary production of the late Professor Bury is his chapter on Dionysius of Syracuse printed in this volume.

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The achievements of Greece in the field of art and thought are set forth in three excellent chapters: that of F. M. Cornford on the Athenian philosophical schools, that of E. Barker on the Greek political thought and theory, and that of Beazley and Robertson on Greek art and architecture. I have nothing to add to what I have already stated on the excellence of the short treatment of Greek art by Beazley and Robertson. It is marvelous how Beazley can condense in a few sentences a world of images. The chapters of Cornford and Barker are masterpieces. However, I am not sure that the chapter of Barker, excellent as it is, could not have been incorporated into the chapter of Cornford.

All in all, the new volumes of the "Cambridge Ancient History" are the best modern guide for anyone who wishes not a mere sketch of the history of Greece but acquaintance with all its problems and facts. In this regard they are much better as a guide than the famous history of Greece by J. Beloch which is full of personal views and personal animosities, and they are as good as the classical book by E. Meyer—and perhaps better since they are up to date.

It is stated that the Russian experts are engaged on a film version of Karl Marx's "Das Kapital." Naturally the Soviet, holding the views it does, troubles little about interest.

## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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