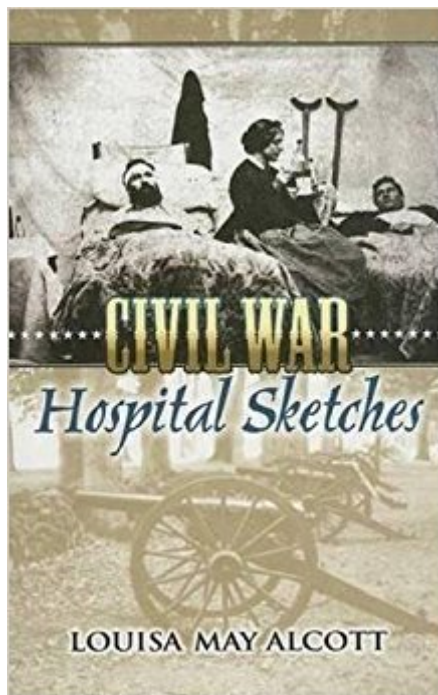


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Civil War Hospital Sketches



Synopsis

Before her wider fame as the author of *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott achieved recognition for her accounts of her work as a volunteer nurse in an army hospital. Written during the winter of 1862–1863, her lively dispatches appeared in the newspaper *Commonwealth*, where they were eagerly read by soldiers' friends and families. Then, as now, these chronicles revealed the desperate realities of battlefield medicine as well as the tentative first steps of women in military service. Writing under a pseudonym, Alcott recounted the vicissitudes of her two-day journey from her home in Concord, Massachusetts, to Washington, D.C. A fiery baptism in the practice of nursing awaited her at Washington Hospital, where she arrived immediately after the slaughter of the Army of the Potomac at the battle of Fredericksburg. Alcott's rapidly paced prose graphically depicts the facts of hospital life, deftly balancing pathos with gentle humor. A vivid and truthful portrait of an often overlooked aspect of the Civil War, this book remains among the most illuminating reports of the era's medical practices as well as a moving testimonial to the war's human cost.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As part of my Civil War reading, I am trying to mix it up between fiction (contemporary and historical), non-fiction, memoir, war and social issues. For my last book of 2012, I read Louisa May Alcott's collection of newspapers articles she wrote about her time as a Civil War nurse in Washington, D.C. in December 1862 and January 1863. LMA only served as a nurse for three weeks, but this brief service changed her life profoundly. Of this time, she said that she was rarely ill

before it and never truly well afterwards. She had contracted typhus at the hospital and was treated with a compound containing mercury, which wreaked havoc on her body and most probably shortened her life. On the other hand, her time as a nurse on her own in a city far from her Concord home during the war broadened her vision and deepened her perspective. In typical Victorian lady fashion, LMA assumes the guise of Tribulation Periwinkle who then provides a first-person account of LMA's own experiences--deciding to join the nursing core, traveling alone by train to Washington, living in a boarding house, working in a hospital (she tended the wounded from the battle of Fredericksburg, Dec. 11-15, 1862). The latter encompasses so much--the men themselves, some old but most heart-breakingly young--she held their hands as they died, read them letters from home, and wrote their final goodbyes, comforted their loved ones--she dressed wounds, assisted surgeons, fed and cleaned and comforted, and then finally fell ill herself. At first the persona of Trib grates a bit--basically Jo March on steroids. Too boisterous, too flip, too hale and hearty, but as LMA went deeper into hospital life, the voice matured and by the end of this short book, only 73 pages, I had come to admire LMA's warm and elegant expressions that transcended pathos. As a primary source for Civil War nursing, it is exceptional in its realistic but respectful look at the price of war. As a look at the young woman who "became" Louisa May Alcott, beloved American author, it is priceless--it provides a concentrated view of LMA, reflecting her values (home, hearth, family, compassion, racial equality, gender equality, and duty). I liked *Little Women* just fine, but I must say that I loved this collection of sketches.

I can see why this was so successful when it was first published. It is a detailed presentation of what life was like in the Civil War period. The minute step by step journey from the author's home into the hospital in Washington DC, by boat, by train, by carriage was marvelous. The hospital work as a nurse to reach out to the many returning from the battle of Fredericksburg, was priceless. The gifted wording of events from a talented writer, before "*Little Women*", describing the events of this time with such skill and precision was a valuable document for my library. Perhaps it is the best thing that I have out of all the memoirs and letters that I carry. The biggest weakness in the presentation, in this very small volume, is the difficulty in translating the language and idioms of the day, but this also created its valuable authenticity. Great book.

Charming account of Alcott's work as a Civil War nurse in an Alexandria, Va. hospital for Union soldiers. There were also a few confederate soldiers as well, which led to some challenging interactions with other staff and patients. A quick read, but a very enjoyable look into Civil War

nursing.

Another Civil War book to read, interested in not only the Civil War but in how the wounded were cared for since my 3rd great grandfather died in a military hospital during the Civil War. So this will add to my genealogical and historical knowledge of the event of the time.

These are dispatches home from Jo -- no doubt about who could have written these. They are interesting in the sense of a young person's first impressions of illness, injury, death, and war. Not to mention, life in the south through the eyes of a Bostoner. Very few letters -- she didn't last long before a fever got her -- but very interesting. The gentlemanly behavior described, the ladylike behavior -- all of it in Jo's style of writing. Great!

A very quick read, and a wonderful trip into the real life experiences of a hospital worker in the 1860's. Our good luck in that she was also a masterful writer!

LMA spent only a few months in a make-shift hospital in Washington City during the War. Her descriptions are captivating and speak loudly about the conditions, the suffering and the hopelessness of 19th century medicine. And, then the sick and wounded began arriving from Fredericksburg.

Fresh and compelling, this short novelette was drawn from Louisa May Alcott's short stint as a hospital nurse during the Civil War. It's delivered with a strong dose of Victorian morality and Victorian prose style, but Alcott's experiences are vividly recorded. So is her sympathy for the wounded and with the African Americans she meets. This is the Civil War as seen through a distinctly New England view, strongly abolitionist and strongly moralistic, but also practical, self-reliant, and positive. I only wish there was more about the hospital. One thing that jumped out at me was the central character's familiarity with death; she is only thirty, but she says she has already been called to several deathbeds. The Victorians may have been repressed, but they knew a lot more about the facts of life than we do.

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