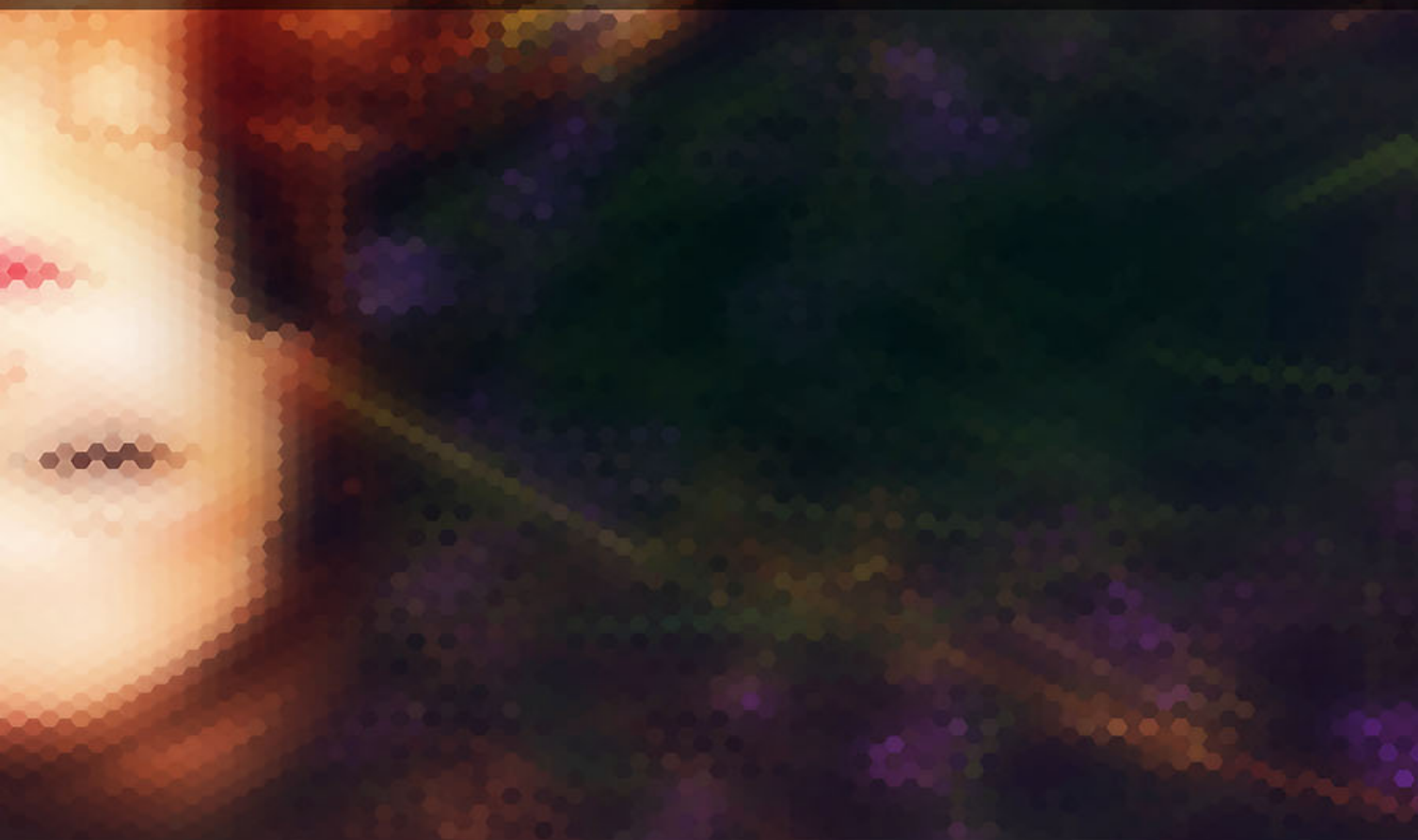


LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

LITTLE WOMEN



COMPLETE 4BOOK COLLECTION

Louisa May Alcott

Little Women (Complete 4Book Collection)

Little Women, Good Wives, Little Men and Jo's Boys

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Frontispiece: They all drew to the fire, mother in the big chair, with Beth at her feet

Preface

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Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents

Beth put a pair of slippers down to warm

I used to be so frightened when it was my turn to sit in the big chair

Do it this way, clasp your hands so

It was a cheerful, hopeful letter

How you used to play Pilgrim's Progress

No one but Beth could get much music out of the old piano

At nine they stopped work and sung as usual

Merry Christmas

The procession set out
Out came Meg with gray horse-hair hanging about her
face
A little figure in cloudy white
The lovers kneeling to receive Don Pedro's blessing
We talked over the fence
Tail-piece
Eating apples and crying over the "Heir of Redclyffe"
Jo undertook to pinch the papered locks
Mrs. Gardiner greeted them
Face to face with the Laurence boy
They sat down on the stairs
Tell about the party
The kitten stuck like a burr just out of reach
Curling herself up in the big chair
Reading that everlasting Belsham
He took her by the ear! by the ear!
Mr. Laurence hooked up a big fish
Tail-piece
Being neighborly
Laurie opened the window
Poll tweaked off his wig
Putting his finger under her chin
Please give these to your mother
Tail-piece
O sir, they do care very much

Mr. Laurence often opened his study door
She put both arms around his neck and kissed him
The Cyclops
Amy bore without flinching several tingling blows
You do know her
Girls, where are you going?
I burnt it up
Held Amy up by his arms and hockey
Packing the go abroady trunk
Meg's partner appeared
Asked to be introduced
I wouldn't, Meg
Holding a hand of each, Mrs. March said, &c.
Mr. Pickwick
Jo threw open the door of the closet
Jo spent the morning on the river
Amy sat down to draw
O Pip! O Pip!
Miss Crocker made a wry face
We'll work like bees
Beth was post-mistress
Amy capped the climax by putting a clothes-pin on her
nose
Mr. Laurence waving his hat
Now, Miss Jo, I'll settle you
A very merry lunch it was

He went prancing down a quiet street

"Oh, rise," she said

A stunning blow from the big Greek lexicon

The Portuguese walked the plank

Will you give me a rose?

Miss Kate put up her glass

Ellen Tree

Tail-piece

Swinging to and fro in his hammock

It was rather a pretty little picture

Waved a brake before her face

I see him bow and smile

Tail-piece

Jo was very busy

Hurrah for Miss March

Jo darted away

Jo laid herself on the sofa and affected to read

November is the most disagreeable month in the year

One of them horrid telegraph things

She came suddenly upon Mr. Brooke

The man clipped

Tail-piece

Letters

She rolled away

I wind the clock

Yours Respectful, Hannah Mullet

Tail-piece

It didn't stir, and I knew it was dead

He sat down beside her

What do you want now?

Beth did have the fever

Gently stroking her head as her mother used to do

Amy's Will

Polish up the spoons and the fat silver teapot

On his back, with all his legs in the air

I should choose this

Gravely promenaded to and fro

Amy's Will

Tail-piece

Mrs. March would not leave Beth's side

Tail-piece

Letters

Jo and her mother were reading the note

Get up and don't be a goose

"Hold your tongue!" cried Jo, covering her ears

He stood at the foot, like a lion in the path

Beth was soon able to lie on the study sofa all day

The Jungfrau

Popping in her head now and then

He sat in the big chair by Beth's sofa

Shall I tell you how?

Bless me, what's all this?

For Mrs. John Brooke

Home of the Little Women

A small watchman's rattle

Tail-piece

The First Wedding

Artistic Attempts

Her foot held fast in a painful of plaster

Please don't, it's mine

Tail-piece

Literary Lessons

A check for one hundred dollars

Tail-piece

Domestic Experiences

Both felt desperately uncomfortable

A bargain, I assure you, ma'am

Laurie heroically shut his eyes while something was put
into his arms

Calls

She took the saddle to the horse

It might have been worse

The call at Aunt March's

Tail-piece

You shall have another table

Bought up the bouquets

Tail-piece

Flo and I ordered a hansom-cab

Every one was very kind, especially the officers
I've seen the imperial family several times
Trying to sketch the gray-stone lion's head on the wall
She leaned her head upon her hands
Now, this is filling at the price
Up with the Bonnets of Bonnie Dundee
I amused myself by dropping gingerbread nuts over the
seat
Thou shalt haf thy Bhaer
He waved his hand, sock and all
Dis is mine effalunt
I sat down upon the floor and read and looked and ate
Tail-piece
In the presence of three gentlemen
A select symposium
He doesn't prink at his glass before coming
Jo stuffed the whole bundle into the stove
He put the sisters into the carriage
He laid his head down on the mossy post
O Jo, can't you?
Tail-piece
With her head in Jo's lap, while the wind blew healthfully
over her
Tail-piece
He hurried forward to meet her
Here are your flowers

Demi and Daisy

Mornin' now

My dear man, it's a bonnet

Tail-piece

Sat piping on a stone while his goats skipped

Laurie threw himself down on the turf

A rough sketch of Laurie taming a horse

The Valley of the Shadow

Tail-piece

Sat staring up at the busts

Turning the ring thoughtfully upon his finger

O Laurie, Laurie, I knew you'd come

How well we pull together

Jo and her father

Jo laid her head on a comfortable rag-bag and cried

A substantial lifelike ghost leaning over her

The tall uncle proceeded to toss and tousle the small nephew

Mr. Bhaer sang heartily

Mrs. Laurence sitting in her mother's lap

They began to pace up and down

Tail-piece

Me loves evvybody

What makes my legs go, dranpa?

Dranpa, it's a We

Tail-piece

Mr. Bhaer and Jo were enjoying promenades

Looking up she saw Mr. Bhaer

Does this suit you, Mr. Bhaer?

Under the umbrella

Tail-piece

Harvest time

Teddy bore a charmed life

Leaving Mrs. March and her daughters under the festival
tree

Tail-piece





**"They all drew to the fire, mother in the big chair
with Beth at her feet"**



"Go then, my little Book, and show to all
That entertain and bid thee welcome shall,
What thou dost keep close shut up in thy breast;
And wish what thou dost show them may be blest
To them for good, may make them choose to be
Pilgrims better, by far, than thee or me.

Tell them of Mercy; she is one
Who early hath her pilgrimage begun.
Yea, let young damsels learn of her to prize
The world which is to come, and so be wise;
For little tripping maids may follow God
Along the ways which saintly feet have trod."

Adapted from John Bunyan.

Little Women

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Chapter One. Playing Pilgrims.

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Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents

Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

"It's so dreadful to be poor!" sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress.

"I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all," added little Amy, with an injured sniff.

"We've got father and mother and each other," said Beth contentedly, from her corner.

The four young faces on which the firelight shone brightened at the cheerful words, but darkened again as Jo said sadly,—

"We haven't got father, and shall not have him for a long time." She didn't say "perhaps never," but each silently added it, thinking of father far away, where the fighting was.

Nobody spoke for a minute; then Meg said in an altered tone,—

"You know the reason mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas was because it is going to be a hard winter for every one; and she thinks we ought not to spend money for pleasure, when our men are suffering so in the army. We can't do much, but we can make our little sacrifices, and ought to do it gladly. But I am afraid I don't;" and Meg shook her head, as she thought regretfully of all the pretty things she wanted.

"But I don't think the little we should spend would do any good. We've each got a dollar, and the army wouldn't be much helped by our giving that. I agree not to expect anything from mother or you, but I do want to buy Undine and Sintram for myself; I've wanted it so long," said Jo, who was a bookworm.

"I planned to spend mine in new music," said Beth, with a little sigh, which no one heard but the hearth-brush and kettle-holder.

"I shall get a nice box of Faber's drawing-pencils; I really need them," said Amy decidedly.

"Mother didn't say anything about our money, and she won't wish us to give up everything. Let's each buy what we want, and have a little fun; I'm sure we work hard enough to earn it," cried Jo, examining the heels of her shoes in a gentlemanly manner.

"I know I do,—teaching those tiresome children nearly all day, when I'm longing to enjoy myself at home," began Meg, in the complaining tone again.

"You don't have half such a hard time as I do," said Jo. "How would you like to be shut up for hours with a nervous, fussy old lady, who keeps you trotting, is never satisfied, and worries you till you're ready to fly out of the window or cry?"

"It's naughty to fret; but I do think washing dishes and keeping things tidy is the worst work in the world. It makes me cross; and my hands get so stiff, I can't practise well at all;" and Beth looked at her rough hands with a sigh that any one could hear that time.

"I don't believe any of you suffer as I do," cried Amy; "for you don't have to go to school with impertinent girls, who plague you if you don't know your lessons, and laugh at your dresses, and label your father if he isn't rich, and insult you when your nose isn't nice."

"If you mean libel, I'd say so, and not talk about labels, as if papa was a pickle-bottle," advised Jo, laughing.

"I know what I mean, and you needn't be statirical about it. It's proper to use good words, and improve your vocabilary," returned Amy, with dignity.

"Don't peck at one another, children. Don't you wish we had the money papa lost when we were little, Jo? Dear me! how happy and good we'd be, if we had no worries!" said Meg, who could remember better times.

"You said the other day, you thought we were a deal happier than the King children, for they were fighting and fretting all the time, in spite of their money."

"So I did, Beth. Well, I think we are; for, though we do have to work, we make fun for ourselves, and are a pretty jolly set, as Jo would say."

"Jo does use such slang words!" observed Amy, with a reproving look at the long figure stretched on the rug. Jo

immediately sat up, put her hands in her pockets, and began to whistle.

"Don't, Jo; it's so boyish!"

"That's why I do it."

"I detest rude, unlady-like girls!"

"I hate affected, niminy-piminy chits!"

"'Birds in their little nests agree,'" sang Beth, the peacemaker, with such a funny face that both sharp voices softened to a laugh, and the "pecking" ended for that time.

"Really, girls, you are both to be blamed," said Meg, beginning to lecture in her elder-sisterly fashion. "You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks, and to behave better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl; but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady."

"I'm not! and if turning up my hair makes me one, I'll wear it in two tails till I'm twenty," cried Jo, pulling off her net, and shaking down a chestnut mane. "I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China-aster! It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boys' games and work and manners! I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy; and it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with papa, and I can only stay at home and knit, like a poky old woman!" And Jo shook the blue army-sock till the needles rattled like castanets, and her ball bounded across the room.

"Poor Jo! It's too bad, but it can't be helped; so you must try to be contented with making your name boyish, and playing brother to us girls," said Beth, stroking the rough head at her knee with a hand that all the dish-washing and dusting in the world could not make ungentle in its touch.

"As for you, Amy," continued Meg, "you are altogether too particular and prim. Your airs are funny now; but you'll grow up an affected little goose, if you don't take care. I like your nice manners and refined ways of speaking, when you don't try to be elegant; but your absurd words are as bad as Jo's slang."

"If Jo is a tom-boy and Amy a goose, what am I, please?" asked Beth, ready to share the lecture.

"You're a dear, and nothing else," answered Meg warmly; and no one contradicted her, for the "Mouse" was the pet of the family.

As young readers like to know "how people look," we will take this moment to give them a little sketch of the four sisters, who sat knitting away in the twilight, while the December snow fell quietly without, and the fire crackled cheerfully within. It was a comfortable old room, though the carpet was faded and the furniture very plain; for a good picture or two hung on the walls, books filled the recesses, chrysanthemums and Christmas roses bloomed in the windows, and a pleasant atmosphere of home-peace pervaded it.

Margaret, the eldest of the four, was sixteen, and very pretty, being plump and fair, with large eyes, plenty of soft, brown hair, a sweet mouth, and white hands, of which she was rather vain. Fifteen-year-old Jo was very tall, thin, and brown, and reminded one of a colt; for she never seemed to know what to do with her long limbs, which were very much in her way. She had a decided mouth, a comical nose, and sharp, gray eyes, which appeared to see everything, and were by turns fierce, funny, or thoughtful. Her long, thick hair was her one beauty; but it was usually bundled into a net, to be out of her way. Round shoulders had Jo, big hands and feet, a fly-away look to her clothes, and the

uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman, and didn't like it. Elizabeth—or Beth, as every one called her—was a rosy, smooth-haired, bright-eyed girl of thirteen, with a shy manner, a timid voice, and a peaceful expression, which was seldom disturbed. Her father called her "Little Tranquillity," and the name suited her excellently; for she seemed to live in a happy world of her own, only venturing out to meet the few whom she trusted and loved. Amy, though the youngest, was a most important person,—in her own opinion at least. A regular snow-maiden, with blue eyes, and yellow hair, curling on her shoulders, pale and slender, and always carrying herself like a young lady mindful of her manners. What the characters of the four sisters were we will leave to be found out.

The clock struck six; and, having swept up the hearth, Beth put a pair of slippers down to warm. Somehow the sight of the old shoes had a good effect upon the girls; for mother was coming, and every one brightened to welcome her. Meg stopped lecturing, and lighted the lamp, Amy got out of the easy-chair without being asked, and Jo forgot how tired she was as she sat up to hold the slippers nearer to the blaze.



"They are quite worn out; Marmee must have a new pair."

"I thought I'd get her some with my dollar," said Beth.

"No, I shall!" cried Amy.

"I'm the oldest," began Meg, but Jo cut in with a decided

—

"I'm the man of the family now papa is away, and I shall provide the slippers, for he told me to take special care of mother while he was gone."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Beth; "let's each get her something for Christmas, and not get anything for ourselves."

"That's like you, dear! What will we get?" exclaimed Jo.

Every one thought soberly for a minute; then Meg announced, as if the idea was suggested by the sight of her own pretty hands, "I shall give her a nice pair of gloves."

"Army shoes, best to be had," cried Jo.

"Some handkerchiefs, all hemmed," said Beth.

"I'll get a little bottle of cologne; she likes it, and it won't cost much, so I'll have some left to buy my pencils," added

Amy.

"How will we give the things?" asked Meg.

"Put them on the table, and bring her in and see her open the bundles. Don't you remember how we used to do on our birthdays?" answered Jo.



"I used to be so frightened when it was my turn to sit in the big chair with the crown on, and see you all come marching round to give the presents, with a kiss. I liked the things and the kisses, but it was dreadful to have you sit looking at me while I opened the bundles," said Beth, who was toasting her face and the bread for tea, at the same time.

"Let Marmee think we are getting things for ourselves, and then surprise her. We must go shopping to-morrow afternoon, Meg; there is so much to do about the play for Christmas night," said Jo, marching up and down, with her hands behind her back and her nose in the air.

"I don't mean to act any more after this time; I'm getting too old for such things," observed Meg, who was as much a child as ever about "dressing-up" frolics.

"You won't stop, I know, as long as you can trail round in a white gown with your hair down, and wear gold-paper jewelry. You are the best actress we've got, and there'll be

an end of everything if you quit the boards," said Jo. "We ought to rehearse to-night. Come here, Amy, and do the fainting scene, for you are as stiff as a poker in that."

"I can't help it; I never saw any one faint, and I don't choose to make myself all black and blue, tumbling flat as you do. If I can go down easily, I'll drop; if I can't, I shall fall into a chair and be graceful; I don't care if Hugo does come at me with a pistol," returned Amy, who was not gifted with dramatic power, but was chosen because she was small enough to be borne out shrieking by the villain of the piece.



"Do it this way; clasp your hands so, and stagger across the room, crying frantically, 'Roderigo! save me! save me!'" and away went Jo, with a melodramatic scream which was truly thrilling.

Amy followed, but she poked her hands out stiffly before her, and jerked herself along as if she went by machinery; and her "Ow!" was more suggestive of pins being run into her than of fear and anguish. Jo gave a despairing groan, and Meg laughed outright, while Beth let her bread burn as she watched the fun, with interest.

"It's no use! Do the best you can when the time comes, and if the audience laugh, don't blame me. Come on, Meg."

Then things went smoothly, for Don Pedro defied the world in a speech of two pages without a single break; Hagar, the witch, chanted an awful incantation over her kettleful of simmering toads, with weird effect; Roderigo rent his chains asunder manfully, and Hugo died in agonies of remorse and arsenic, with a wild "Ha! ha!"

"It's the best we've had yet," said Meg, as the dead villain sat up and rubbed his elbows.

"I don't see how you can write and act such splendid things, Jo. You're a regular Shakespeare!" exclaimed Beth, who firmly believed that her sisters were gifted with wonderful genius in all things.

"Not quite," replied Jo modestly. "I do think 'The Witch's Curse, an Operatic Tragedy,' is rather a nice thing; but I'd like to try Macbeth, if we only had a trap-door for Banquo. I always wanted to do the killing part. 'Is that a dagger that I see before me?'" muttered Jo, rolling her eyes and clutching at the air, as she had seen a famous tragedian do.

"No, it's the toasting fork, with mother's shoe on it instead of the bread. Beth's stage-struck!" cried Meg, and the rehearsal ended in a general burst of laughter.

"Glad to find you so merry, my girls," said a cheery voice at the door, and actors and audience turned to welcome a tall, motherly lady, with a "can-I-help-you" look about her which was truly delightful. She was not elegantly dressed, but a noble-looking woman, and the girls thought the gray cloak and unfashionable bonnet covered the most splendid mother in the world.

"Well, dearies, how have you got on to-day? There was so much to do, getting the boxes ready to go to-morrow, that I didn't come home to dinner. Has any one called, Beth? How is your cold, Meg? Jo, you look tired to death. Come and kiss me, baby."

While making these maternal inquiries Mrs. March got her wet things off, her warm slippers on, and sitting down in the easy-chair, drew Amy to her lap, preparing to enjoy the happiest hour of her busy day. The girls flew about, trying to make things comfortable, each in her own way. Meg arranged the tea-table; Jo brought wood and set chairs, dropping, overturning, and clattering everything she touched; Beth trotted to and fro between parlor and kitchen, quiet and busy; while Amy gave directions to every one, as she sat with her hands folded.

As they gathered about the table, Mrs. March said, with a particularly happy face, "I've got a treat for you after supper."

A quick, bright smile went round like a streak of sunshine. Beth clapped her hands, regardless of the biscuit she held, and Jo tossed up her napkin, crying, "A letter! a letter! Three cheers for father!"

"Yes, a nice long letter. He is well, and thinks he shall get through the cold season better than we feared. He sends all sorts of loving wishes for Christmas, and an especial message to you girls," said Mrs. March, patting her pocket as if she had got a treasure there.

"Hurry and get done! Don't stop to quirk your little finger, and simper over your plate, Amy," cried Jo, choking in her tea, and dropping her bread, butter side down, on the carpet, in her haste to get at the treat.

Beth ate no more, but crept away, to sit in her shadowy corner and brood over the delight to come, till the others were ready.

"I think it was so splendid in father to go as a chaplain when he was too old to be drafted, and not strong enough for a soldier," said Meg warmly.