UNDER THE LILACS (1878)
“Miss Alcott’s New Story.” ([October 1877?]). Clippings File.

“Under the Lilacs,” a new serial story, by Louisa M. Alcott, will begin in the November number of *St. Nicholas*, and continue through the coming volume. This announcement alone should insure for *St. Nicholas* a place in every family circle. No living writer gives us purer, fresher and more healthful stories than Miss Alcott, and no other stories have such charms for young people as have hers.

“St. Nicholas.” ([September–October 1878?]). Clippings File.

The Fifth Volume [of *St. Nicholas*] and “Under the Lilacs” come to an end together. While in regard to a large portion of people whom we know, we are unable to see why they were allowed to enter the world, we are quite clear that Miss Louisa Alcott was created expressly to write stories for young people.

*Book Exchange Weekly* (October [1878]). Clippings File.

Miss Alcott’s latest story, “Under the Lilacs,” has already won its place of favor, while publishing as a serial story in *St. Nicholas*[,] We have followed the course of the story somewhat in our comments from month to month on the magazine, and we have said what we say again with the fullest confidence, that “Under the Lilacs” is the very best of Miss Alcott’s books, better even than “Little Women.” It is the story of a wandering circus boy, and the friends who took him to their hearts in the time of his sorest distress. Ben, the circus boy, is a new and particularly interesting figure in [j]uvenile fiction; while Miss Celia, if not so new, is a personage worthy of a place in fiction that is not juvenile.


Miss Alcott is never so much at home as when she writes for children; and in her children’s story-books she seems to have an endless variety of character and incident, and to write with very little effort. No doubt the labor is there, and sometimes a severe and irksome labor, – to invent scenes, to imagine dialogues, to create the small personages who hop, skip and jump through the amusing chapters, – but there is seldom any appearance of task-work. On the contrary, the books run along in a rather hap-hazard way, taking their turn and following their cue from chance, rather than from study and design. Such, at any rate, is the quality of “Under the Lilacs,” which Roberts is just publishing in a volume of 305 pages, with a few wood-engravings, not all the same as those which illustrated her chapters in “St Nicholas.” There is the same watchful and rigid moral tone which shows itself in
Miss Alcott’s books, by the frequent reminder of what virtue is and what it is not; but, for all that, the moral does not seem to drag the story along with it, like a horse caught in a lasso. It is an accompaniment, rather than the main thing, and there are so many divergences from the strait and narrow road in which good little boys and girls are made to travel by Miss Edgeworth, by Jacob Abbott, and by other writers of story-books – that fault has been found with Miss Alcott for this very freedom which she uses. Especially in her dialogues, it is complained that she permits girls to talk in something like slang, and with an occasional inelegance that shocks the careful mamma. This may be so, – for conformity to rule, or to what is expected, is not Miss Alcott’s most marked trait; on the contrary, she follows a method of her own, and makes her small world follow a morality and an etiquette that agrees with her own ideas. That this is satisfactory to the public sufficiently appears by the popularity of her books; that it is also in the interest of genuine good morals and good manners, upon the whole, is also evident to those who read her books with this subject in their thoughts. Very few of her readers do this, probably, – being drawn on insensibly until they lose their critical faculty in the interest which the story itself excites.

This is true of “Under the Lilacs.” The story is a very simple one, – the plot is slender and the main incidents are few, – but the succession of events and the amusement or wonder aroused by the story soon gives the reader a strong desire to know how it will turn out and what will happen next. Will that amusing and pathetic dog ever be found? How will Ben Brown get down from the maple tree? Who will win at the shooting-match? These and such as these are the thrilling questions that “quicken the pulse and suffuse the eyes,” as Webster said about a visit to the battlefield of Marathon. The test of a good writer is that he makes any trivial matter important and interesting, – and this test Miss Alcott never fails to pass. More than this, she lets her sympathy with the unfortunate and her regard for what is best appear so constantly in the most trivial details, that the heart is touched and the imagination kindled so that a very small matter looks almost epic in its proportions. Then, without being perfect in her management of the dialogue, she is so naturally dramatic that what is said and done by her personages brings them before us with a life-like reality, and we laugh and cry over them as we do at a good play. All this is said by way of accounting for the effect which Miss Alcott’s books produce, – for we are not prepared, off-hand, to expect that they will be as good as we find they are. Shall I add one other thing, then, to account for a success the more flattering because it is always a little unexpected? There is in her books – foreign as they may seem to the high spiritual doctrines of her father and the other early transcendentalists – something of that perception of the grand in the petty, the invisible in the every-day object, the ineffable in the every-day chatter of life, which gives an exaltation beyond the highest intellectual achievement.

“Seek not beyond thy cottage wall
Redeemers that can yield thee all:
...” [10 lines omitted.]


There are large advance orders for Miss Alcott’s “Under the Lilacs,” which comes
from Roberts Brothers of course. The demand for all her works continues as large as that for the writings of any American author, and her publishers have paid her enough in copyrights to make her independent for life. Miss Alcott is probably the author of “Gemini” in the No Name series, a very good novel; but she finds her greatest popularity in stories like “Under the Lilacs”.

**Boston Evening Transcript**

541.15,803 (23 October 1878): 6:1.

It makes little difference whether Miss Alcott writes a book for grown people or for children; both are sure to read it and both equally enjoy it. “Under the Lilacs,” which for the past year has been running through the pages of St. Nicholas, constituting one of the chief attractions of that magazine, has been brought out in a handsome little volume by Roberts Brothers, uniform in style with “Little Women[,]” “An Old Fashioned Girl[,]” and other works by the same author. The central figure in the story is little Ben Brown, a runaway circus boy, who makes his appearance at the house “under the lilacs” in one of the first chapters, in a ragged and half-starved condition. With him is his trick dog Sancho, a remarkably intelligent animal, whose training in the ring amounts to a liberal education. Benny is taken into the family, and in spite of the impress which his former mode of life has made upon him, develops into a faithful, trustworthy boy. The story is full of action, and though its main interest centres in Benny, girl readers will find it as enjoyable as if it had been written especially for their benefit.

**The Boston Post**


With the children of New England, Louisa Alcott is a household name. Her “Little Women[,]” “An Old Fashioned Girl” and other books have delighted the children, and they are ever on the alert for her announcement of something new. The advent of “Under the Lilacs” will be joyful news to the young folks around many a hearthstone, and many a smiling face on peering into the capacious stocking on Christmas morn will find “Under the Lilacs” snugly stowed away, the gift of a loving mother or some other member of the household. It would not be at all surprising if all the children for whom it was especially written had read it through and through long before the Christmas season, so popular are Miss Alcott’s stories with the children.

Well, “Under the Lilacs” is a nice story. The hero is a little boy who has deserted a travelling circus with which he had been connected, deserted it because of the ill-treatment to which he was subjected. The little fellow seeks out a home, and he finds one – a nice one, too – and lots of pleasant friends. He also has a dog, faithful little Ben [Sancho], who is a hero also, and knows almost as much as his master. The rest of the story we will leave for the boys and girls to find out.

**Hartford Daily Courant**

52.252 (25 October 1878): [1]:7.

No man writes more to the satisfaction of children than Louise Alcott, and to
no one’s guidance would parents more willingly surrender their children. Her latest story, *Under the Lilacs*, which has been so popular in the *St. Nicholas*, is now published in a neat volume, which will be a prime favorite in the holidays.

**The Publishers’ Weekly**

14.17 (26 October 1878): 506.

A little boy who runs away from a circus troupe, where he has been badly treated, is the hero of this story. Worn out with fatigue and hunger, he hides in an uninhabited house, and is found there with his dog by the good woman who takes charge of the mansion in the absence of its owner. She and her two little girls, Bab and Betty, live in a little cottage at the gate, and here poor Ben Brown is carried, and fed and cared for. Ben and his dog Sancho, a curly, white poodle, that has been taught all kinds of amusing tricks, are the salient figures in the landscape, from this out. They reluctantly give up the ring and sawdust, and become respectable members of society. The old house is re-opened, and its charming owner takes a sisterly interest in Ben, and promotes him to her own service. Ben has some sorrows, but on the whole gets much pleasure out of life. Ben, Bab and Betty, and Sancho the dog, are most charming pictures. They dance through the volume, enlivening every page with their reckless love of fun and adventure. Altogether one of the loveliest children’s books we have read.

“Under the Lilacs.”

**Boston Courier** 55.35 (27 October 1878): 4:3.

Miss Louisa Alcott’s book, *Under the Lilacs* (Roberts Brothers) is certainly a very fascinating story. We may think that the two principal female figures are rather childish in behavior for their years, we may question the wisdom in a book for young people, who are not supposed to be readers of *Nicholas Nickleby* of making a casual comparison with “those dear little Kenwigses;” but we must admit that the author has the child's heart within the woman’s, and that she knows how to create very charming and natural types of girlhood and boyhood. Bab and Betty are well individualized, and Ben Brown, the runaway circus boy, has a spice of originality about him that will place him in the foremost rank of juvenile heroes; while Sancho, his trick dog, will be almost as great a favorite as his master.


It is dedicated “to Emma, Ida, Carl and Lina, over the sea, by their new friend and sister,” and we doubt not is destined to delight thousands of children in foreign lands as well as in this country. It is needful to say that this story possesses all the charm of the previous stories of the same author. It is difficult to say in just what it lies, but it certainly is there.
We have no more delightful writer of stories for the young than Miss Louisa M. Alcott, whose name as the author of ‘Little men’ and ‘Little women’ is endeared in many and many a household. She writes with a naturalness quite her own, and the sprightliness and vigour of her style often commend her books to older readers. ‘Under the Lilacs,’ is her latest story, and it displays fully as much ability and grasp of character as any of her previous books. The romance is skilfully and gracefully told, and while a moral is pointed, the absence of ‘goody-goody’ padding is quite conspicuous. ‘Under the Lilacs’ traces the history of a fatherless circus boy, and we are introduced to a number of pleasant people, and a variety of incidents of some moment. The story is told with real dramatic effect and cannot fail to create a genuine impression for good on the reader. It is not full of dry details or uninteresting verbiage, but every line sparkles with interest and reflected light from the author’s genius.

Miss Louise M. Alcott’s new story, Under the Lilacs, has for its hero a small boy, who has run away from a travelling circus, where he was ill treated, and who finds friends and a happy home. He has a small dog named “Sancho,” who is wonderful indeed, and quite as much of a hero as “Ben” himself; and then there are two little girls, and a very sweet lady, and several other attractive characters. Like all of the author’s works, it is natural, charming, and of interest to old and young, particularly to the latter, who will not rest quiet, we fear, without its possession. It is a benediction for the holidays.

The readers of the St. Nicholas are already acquainted with the fortunes of Ben and
Sancho, Bob and Betty, Sam, Celia, and the rest of the young people who are gathered into this charming story. Now that the story has become a book, it will renew the pleasure of thousands who have read it once, and to thousands more may bring fresh pleasure and profit. There is adventure enough in it to keep the attention of the most wide-awake boys and girls, and enough sweet temper and good feeling to infect them with that good health of the mind which is always so marked a characteristic of Miss Alcott’s books.

Roberts & Brothers have issued another little volume from the bright and child-loving pen of Miss L. M. Alcott. It is entitled, Under the Lilacs, and records the remarkable and amusing process of civilizing and introducing into polite life a very intelligent, but utterly uncultivated, circus boy. The telling of the story is the wonderful thing about the book; and this is inimitable.

The simple events of juvenile life are here transformed into gold and pearls for the delectation of the young folk who have already learned the magic charm of the author’s pen. Miss Alcott’s stores of entertainment for the flaxen-haired youngsters that make up her audience seem quite exhaustless, and in the present merry little history she has opened a new vein no less agreeable than her previous offerings. With her wide likings she loves dogs and horses as well as children, and makes them play a prominent part in her pleasant narrative. Whether Bab, Bess, Ben, Sancho, or Lita will be voted the greatest favorite is a question for her impartial listeners.

Although the authoress’s name is not by any means unknown, and her previous books justified us in expecting something better than the common run of children’s stories, we were hardly prepared for so fresh and delightful a tale as this. The scene is, of course, laid in North America; but although English children may be puzzled by a few Yankee expressions, and by allusions to fruit, flowers, and insects, they have never heard of, there is nothing in the book at all repulsive to our ideas, and the events related could just as well have happened in a quiet country town in England. To a woman of moderate means who, with her two little daughters, has charge of a large empty house, comes a poor little starving boy who has escaped from a circus, where he was ill-treated. The little acrobat is fed, clothed, and made much of; the tricks he and his dog perform win for him the applause of the children, and his bright and quick ways make him a valuable acquisition to the young lady, who, with her invalid brother, come to occupy the house. He is occasionally tempted to return to a roaming life; but the report of the

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**New York Daily Tribune**

38.11,743 (15 November 1878): 6:2.

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**The Examiner**

no. 3696 (30 November 1878): 1526:1–2.

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death of his father sobers him, and his aim is thenceforth to be “respectable.” The loss of his poodle, Sancho, when the hero is tempted to visit a travelling circus, forms one of the principal episodes in the book, and when he is at last found again, but dyed black, and shorn of his beautiful tail, which he was in the habit of holding in his paw (we had almost written hand) whilst waltzing, the joy of all the little and big people in the book is fully shared by the reader. After this episode Ben’s progress in the paths of respectability, which, in Miss Alcott’s hands, never means dulness, is as rapid as it is constant; and, when his father returns safe and sound to settle down as an ostler in the town, his happiness is complete. This delightful book winds up, as all books should, with a double marriage “under the lilacs.”

The children who have been delighted with Little Women and Good Wives will be no less pleased with Under the Lilacs. The hero, Ben, is an escaped circus boy, who arrives, weary and footsore, at the lodge of a great house, accompanied by his performing dog Sancho. The pair are kindly received by Mrs. Moss and her two little girls, Bab and Betty, and are watched over by Miss Celia, who lives at the manor. The account of Ben’s first church-going is very graphic. To keep him quiet, and at the same time to prevent him from “nestling round” during the sermon, Miss Celia gives him a book of Scripture narratives, in which Ben, deeply interested, takes a picture of David and Goliath for that of Jack the Giant Killer and Cormoran. The children are thoroughly childlike and healthyminded, as all Miss Alcott’s children are; though of course, to an English mind, the social relations of the characters are somewhat strange. Not the least interesting personage is Sancho. The story of his loss by the children, when they have run away to see the circus, and his discovery some weeks later, dyed, dirty, and with a clipped tail, and of his grief when he found he could no longer waltz with his tail in his mouth, is really most pathetic. We hope many children this Christmas will enjoy his adventures.

Miss Alcott has found her way to the hearts of so many young English readers that the sight of a new story from her pen is sure to create lively anticipations of pleasure. We will say at once that “Under the Lilacs” will satisfy the author’s most ardent admirers.

They will be lucky girls and boys who find “Under the Lilacs” among their Christmas gifts.


Under the Lilacs is a stupid and vulgar story “for young people,” though not very likely to find favour with them. The illustrations are, however, much superior to the letterpress, and some of them possess considerable merit.

Sacramento Union. Quoted in advertisement ([1878?]). Clippings File.

A new book by Miss Alcott, for the young folks, is always received with a joyful welcome. She preaches to great audiences whenever she takes up her pen, and her storehouse of originality seems exhaustless. No woman could write as she does for children if she did not love them. Love flows from every page, gentleness from every line, truth from every sentence. The lady wields a magic pen, and binds her little readers to her by bonds that cannot be broken. “Under the Lilacs” is probably her best book. It is full of sympathy, loving kindness and encouragement, and is so well handled as to plot, detail and activities, as to rivet the attention of young readers and make on their minds ineffaceable impressions for good.

([1878?]). Clippings File.

The rapidly increasing number of those who devote themselves to writing children’s books is certainly a hopeful and encouraging sign of an increasing interest in the welfare of childhood. It must at the same time be admitted that much of the literature of this class is extremely silly and useless. There are comparatively few who succeed in writing really good books for children. But among them Miss Louisa M. Alcott holds a foremost place. Her latest work of this description, “Under the Lilacs,” has just been published in a handsome style by Roberts Brothers, Boston. It is full of interesting incident, calculated to strengthen both the mind and heart of young people. The style is vivacious, pure, healthy and strong. She has the rare charm of imparting to her stories a fascinating and attractive interest, which produces a deep and abiding impression, such as cannot fail to give strength to the moral sense and enlighten the sympathies. “Under the Lilacs” should find its way into every household.
Miss Alcott has won a wide circle of readers. The hero of her new story is a circus boy, who escapes from his oppressors and finds a shelter in a manor-house. Here he comes into contact with other children, and with her usual felicity in describing child life, Miss Alcott tells his adventures and those of his dog. It is a clever story, and will take the first rank among Christmas favourites.

Miss Alcott’s Under the Lilacs (Roberts Brothers) is one of the best boys’ and girls’ stories that has yet flowed from her facile pen. The wonderful dog and his master the runaway circus boy, who figure in its pages and divide the interest with their kind-hearted girl friends Bab and Betty, and a charming Lady Bountiful, will strike the fancy of all genuine boys and girls, and set their thoughts as well as their tongues industriously at work.

The authoress of “Little Women” is always charming. Her half dozen books, written especially for children have found quite as many readers and admirers among mature folks. No one will be able to take up “Under the Lilacs” and lay it down without finding out what finally becomes of Ben “the circus boy” and his charming dog, Sancho.

Checklist of Additional Reviews and Notices
