

***Good Wives* (1869) as the “Social Justice” sequel to *Little Women* (1868)**

In the second chapter of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868), four girls give their breakfast to pauper children who are immigrants from Germany. Later, in what is now commonly referred to as Part I of *Little Women*, thirteen-year-old Beth nurses those same children while they have scarlet fever. In Chapter 4, Beth relays how pleased she was to observe their neighbor giving a fish to an Irish immigrant woman. All of these exemplify what Alcott called “practical Christianity,” by which she meant the practice of aiding those in need. Significantly, these examples all involve a thirteen-year-old.

Good Wives, which is now referred to as Part II of *Little Women* and which is achieving its 150th anniversary in 2019, has been understudied, compared to the 1868 portion of *Little Women*. One goal of this paper is to elucidate how rich the second half of the text is, especially in terms of social justice. In *Good Wives* the March sisters are approximately four years older. While Meg, now about 20, is largely absent from the social justice tales in the second half of Alcott’s narrative, the three who are still teenagers at the beginning of *Good Wives* involve themselves with multiple social justice actions, including raising money for the Freedmen at a fair, exploring the dynamics of social class and its conventions, and education reform. Herself a political reformer from a young age, Alcott was well-aware of the contributions children and teenagers can make to social justice movements, and so she imbued these novels—published 150 years ago now—with ideologies that encouraged (and still encourage) young people to recognize their social power.