



Daughter of Boston: The Extraordinary Diary of a Nineteenth-century Woman, Caroline Healey Dall

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This Journal is my safety valve-and it is well, that I can thus rid myself of my superfluous steam . . . I trust posterity will remember this, should it ever be gratified by a glimpse at these pages.

In the nineteenth century, Boston was well known as a center for intellectual ferment. Amidst the popular lecturing of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the discussion groups led by Margaret Fuller sat a remarkable young woman, Caroline Healey Dall (1822-1912): Transcendentalist, early feminist, writer, reformer, and-perhaps most importantly-active diarist.

Dall kept a diary for seventy-five years. She captured in it all the fascinating details of her sometimes agonizing personal life, but she also wrote about all the major figures who surrounded her-Elizabeth Peabody, Louisa May Alcott, Henry David Thoreau, William Lloyd Garrison, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and countless others. Her diary, filling forty-five volumes in all, is perhaps the longest running diary ever written by any American and the most complete account available of a nineteenth-century woman's life.

Daughter of Boston is a selection of the best from Dall's immense diary, woven together with biographical narrative. The city's celebrations, mob scenes, poverty-ridden neighborhoods, lectures, and exhibits are described with great wit and insight. She also writes colorfully about people whose names never made it into the history books-wives and mothers, fugitives, servants, children, starving ministers, single women looking for outlets for their ambitions, and working people of all ages. Dall constantly strove to make sense of her personal troubles and failures, so the diary also functioned as the perfect vehicle for working out the lessons she believed these troubles were meant to teach.

Daughter of Boston is a completely original and important book: both a significant document of social history and a lively, vivid account of one woman's life and thoughts.

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Damon Smith:

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