



Kate Field: Selected Letters

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Although famous during her lifetime, Kate Field (1838–1896) subsequently slipped into such a state of obscurity that in 1964, when the *St. Louis American* published a bicentennial article to honor one of the city's most distinguished daughters, the eulogy bore the title "Who Was Kate Field?" Carolyn Moss has collected correspondence ranging over more than fifty years to allow Field to answer that question herself.

Field was acquainted with, among numerous others, George Eliot, Oscar Wilde, Julia Ward Howe, Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, the Brownings, and the Trollopes. Outside the world of literature, she hobnobbed with such men and women as Harriet Hosmer, Horace Greeley, Gilbert and Sullivan, Stanley and Livingstone, and Alexander Graham Bell. That Field's contemporaries attached much importance to her correspondence is demonstrated by the fact that her letters were preserved and found their way into more than thirty archives. For those of us heading into the twenty-first century, the letters enrich our knowledge of Field's contemporaries and help illuminate an epoch.

Taking a chronological approach, Moss has divided the correspondence into ten parts. Part 1 covers Field's St. Louis childhood, her days as a Boston schoolgirl, and her trip to Europe. Part 2 deals with her stay in Florence and her friendship with the Brownings, the Trollopes, and other literary visitors. In part 3, Field returns to America, where she achieves fame as a journalist, lecturer, and author. In part 4, she writes of her voyage to London and the grief and readjustment occasioned by the death of her mother. She becomes, in part 5, a playwright and actress, promotes Bell's telephone, and helps establish the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

Part 6 finds Field founding the Ladies' Cooperative Dress Association. Part 7 deals with her campaign against the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints. In part 8, Field crosses America to promote Alaska and to lecture against prohibition. Part 9 contains Field's correspondence as owner and editor of *Kate Field's Washington*, and part 10 shows her final days.

While Field's achievements are indeed impressive, Moss points out that the dauntless spirit of this voteless, unmarried, and at times destitute woman is more impressive still.

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