

INTRODUCTION

This book publishes in full, for the first time, the two most revealing of Mark Twain's private writings about his family life, neither of them actually written for publication. In their company we have placed closely related writing by his wife, Olivia ("Livy"), and by his eldest daughter, Susy. In this collection the reader will find Samuel Langhorne Clemens in the context of the daily life he shared with Livy, their three daughters, a great many servants, and an imposing array of pets.



The exuberant "Family Sketch" has its origins in Mark Twain's response to unimaginable loss. Susy Clemens died on 18 August 1896, at the age of twenty-four, succumbing to meningitis in the Hartford, Connecticut, house where she and her sisters were raised. Her father, mother, and sister Clara were in England, having just completed a tour around the world. Alerted by cablegram to her illness, mother and daughter crossed the Atlantic to be with Susy. She died before they arrived. Starting in these first days of his grief, and continuing at intervals over the next five years, Mark Twain tried to write a memorial to Susy, accumulating a large mass of mostly unfinished manuscript. Some of this material was eventually incorporated into his *Autobiography*, which he dictated and compiled in 1906–9; but most of it remains unpublished. Inevitably, his project of a memorial to Susy was never completed. Years later, his secretary, Isabel V. Lyon, recorded his admission that he "was never able to write a memorial

of her. It was never anything but a Lament, & couldn't ever be anything but that.”¹

Yet from these abandoned papers, full of loose ends and repetitions, there arose one complete and startling essay. It springs from the same impetus as the rest of the “Susy memorial” manuscripts: its original title was “In Memory of Olivia Susan Clemens, 1872–1896.” But having set out to commemorate Susy, Clemens found “A Family Sketch” growing under his hands to become an account of the entire household—family and servants too. Servants especially, we might say; for herein will be found his fullest and most revealing account of the household servants, their characters and their part in the Clemenses’ lives. Four of them, especially long-serving, are singled out for greater attention: Patrick McAleer (coachman), George Griffin (butler), Katy Leary (lady’s maid; housekeeper, after Livy’s death), and Rosina Hay (nursemaid). To these must be added the remarkable account of Maria McLaughlin, wet-nurse, of brief tenure and immortal fame. Free from the anguished note that runs through the other Susy manuscripts, “A Family Sketch” describes the Clemens family in the period of its flourishing.

The manuscript was not composed at a single sitting. From physical evidence and mentions of dates, we can judge it was mainly composed in 1901–2; yet parts of it incorporate or revise pages clearly written nearer the date of Susy’s death. Clemens returned to the manuscript around 1906 and made a few revisions. If he was thinking of using this material in the *Autobiography*, he decided against it. His plans for the sketch remain unknown. A reference in the sketch itself to the personal friends “to whom this small book will go” was later deleted by the author. It is not even certain what happened to this manuscript when Clemens died in 1910. It was not part of the Mark Twain Papers bequeathed by Clara, his sole heir, to the University of California in 1949. Perhaps at that time it was already in the Doheny Library in southern California, or that library may have acquired it in one of several sales of Clara’s property in the 1950s. Sold when the Doheny collection was broken up in 1988,

the manuscript passed to the James S. Copley Library in San Diego; that library was sold at auction in 2010, and “A Family Sketch” was acquired by The Bancroft Library. It is now in the Mark Twain Papers; this is its first complete publication.

The last “character” drawn in “A Family Sketch” is that of Mary Ann Cord, the cook at Sue Crane’s farm outside Elmira, New York, where the Clemenses spent the summers. Clemens, for whom endings were always a problem, requires his editor to conclude the “Sketch” by appending the lightly fictionalized account of “Aunt Cord” which he had published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1874: “A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It.” This short tale has, as Clemens warned *Atlantic* editor William Dean Howells, “no humor in it.”² Aunt Rachel (Cord’s fictional incarnation) is introduced as a laughing, loyal servant—uncomfortably resembling, at first glance, the “happy ducky” of antebellum nostalgia. When “Mr. C.” asks her how it happens that she has reached the age of sixty and “never had any trouble,” Rachel’s aspect changes, and she unfolds her own story of slavery, the forced dispersion of her family, and its (partial) restoration. Mark Twain expressively deploys spatial and physical relationships between the speaker and the listeners: Rachel starts out “sitting respectfully below our level, on the steps” of the porch, but rises midway through her story, “and now she towered above us, black against the stars.” As she brings her tale to its close, Rachel is even manhandling Mr. C., “pushing,” “grabbing” and “shoving” his foot, clothing and hair—familiarities which, under slavery, would have been whipping or killing offenses.³

As his first publication in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the country’s preeminent literary journal, “A True Story” was a career landmark for Mark Twain; and if the publication opened up new opportunities for him, so did the subject matter and the technique. In his future writing the use of dialect narration, and the exploration of race and slavery, would figure prominently. “A True Story” is presented here in a freshly prepared text based on the original manuscript. The spelling—obviously significant in the case of dialect narration—hews closely to Mark Twain’s manuscript, giving Rachel’s

speech a starker and simpler aspect—one that was obscured by the fussy spelling and punctuation imposed by the *Atlantic Monthly* editors in 1874 and reproduced in all subsequent reprintings.

“A Record of the Small Foolishnesses of Susie & ‘Bay’ Clemens (Infants)” is a manuscript record kept by the parents of the sayings and doings of their daughters. The title reflects the tally of daughters at the time the record was begun; youngest daughter Jean would not be born until 1880. The record accumulated between 1876 and 1885; three entries are in Livy’s hand, the rest in her husband’s. Mark Twain usually referred to it as “the Children’s Record.” This is its first complete publication.

In an autobiographical dictation of 5 September 1906 Mark Twain said:

It is years since I have examined the Children’s Record. I have turned over a few of its pages this morning. This book is a record in which Mrs. Clemens and I registered some of the sayings and doings of the children, in the long ago, when they were little chaps. Of course we wrote these things down at the time because they were of momentary interest—things of the passing hour, and of no permanent value—but at this distant day I find that they still possess an interest for me and also a value, because it turns out that they were registrations of character. The qualities then revealed by fitful glimpses, in childish acts and speeches, remained as a permanency in the children’s characters in the drift of the years, and were always afterward clearly and definitely recognizable.⁴

On this subject, it ought to be remarked that accurate registrations of character may nevertheless be faulty registrations of fact. Take the anecdote of Clara at prayer (page 00): from a contemporary letter from Livy to her husband, we know that it was actually Susy who declared “O, one’s enough!”⁵ But this utterance fit Mark Twain’s idea of Clara’s character—worldly, pragmatic—better than it did his idea of Susy’s; he was not present when the words were said; and despite Livy’s accurate report, he unconsciously transferred the saying to Clara. Certainly “Small

Foolishnesses” has aims in view beyond mere accurate reporting. Longer entries, clustering mostly around 1880, attain an essayistic character, fluent and discursive.

To this long-accumulating manuscript, the brief “At the Farm” forms a kind of pendant. Written in the summer of 1884, it picks up where the earlier manuscript leaves off. It gives valuable particulars of Jean, who, as the youngest of the girls, was underrepresented in “Small Foolishnesses.”

Livy’s diary entries from the summer of 1885 were written in what had started out as a guest-book at the Clemenses’ Hartford house. Since they persistently forgot to ask guests to sign it, Livy resolved in June 1885 to “make some use of it,” keeping a diary in its pages through November of that year. (Further entries, not reproduced here, were added in 1892–93, 1894, and 1902.) Writers on Mark Twain have typically found it difficult to grasp Livy’s character; the entries included here will not, perhaps, fundamentally alter this situation, but it has seemed important to let her voice be heard in the present collection. Her writing style is seldom more than functional, but there are compensations. She treats many of the same events related elsewhere in this volume from other family members’ perspective; and, even in the brief compass of this selection, it will be seen that her frame of reference is as broad as her husband’s—quite as many works of science and literature are referred to in her few pages as could be found in an equivalent stretch of Mark Twain’s notebooks. His own accounts of Livy’s character, in these writings and elsewhere, are hyperbolic, and no easier to interpret because of that. He represents her as an untarnishable character, incapable of wrong; it follows that she is the perfect mother, from whose ruling there is no appeal. But Susy, in the biography of her father shortly to be discussed, allows herself more latitude: “Mamma’s oppinions and ideas upon the subject of bringing up children has always been more or less of a joke in our family.” It is indeed difficult to locate the point upon which these testimonies converge.

“Somewhere between the ages of nine and twelve Susy fell to scribbling a little in a fragmentary way,” Mark Twain wrote, “but she was all of thirteen

years old before she deliberately essayed authorship.”⁶ He was delighted, in April 1885, to find that she was composing a biography of himself: “the dearest compliment I could imagine, and the most gratifying.” Just weeks after her death, he remembered that time:

Poor fair & slender & comely little maid, with her plaited tails hanging down her back, what a brave enterprise it was! And we practised treasons against her—her mother & I—for when we found out by accident that she was at this secret labor of love we stole her book every night after she was asleep, & carried it to bed & read it. It was delicious reading, because of its naivety, its penetration, its sure touch, its curiously accurate exploration of my character, & the bland frankness of its judgments upon the questionable features of it. . . . Her studies & travels interfered with the biography; and increasingly; but she never gave up her purpose of completing it. She added a page or so to it at intervals, both at home & abroad; for it shared with Shakespeare the honorable distinction of being carried around with her wherever she went.

Susy’s biography breaks off, mid-sentence, in July 1886. Mark Twain believed she had continued it into 1894, but if there were any addenda to the text, they have not been found.

Susy’s work immortalizes a time when the family was flourishing and the mutual affection and admiration of father and daughter were strong. Little need be said in its explication—Mark Twain did that, inimitably, after Susy’s death. His scheme for a “memorial to Susy” included publication of her book, with his comments.⁷ The book did not appear, and he eventually inserted much of the biography, again with his comments, into his own *Autobiography*. When portions of the *Autobiography* ran as a serial in the *North American Review* (1906–7), passages from Susy’s document figured prominently in the selections. “I cannot bring myself to change any line or word in Susy’s sketch of me,” Mark Twain wrote. “The spelling is frequently desperate, but it was Susy’s, and it shall stand. . . . To correct it would alloy

it, not refine it.”⁸ Actually, he did modify many of Susy’s misspellings, and inserted clarifications of fact. A different approach was taken by Charles Neider in his 1985 edition. Neider intended to give Susy’s orthography as she left it; his transcription, however, was careless, and he included Mark Twain’s comments and diversions, as printed in his *Autobiography*. The present edition aims to preserve Susy’s spelling and grammar, with minimal editorial correction, and to print her little book as she wrote it, without the intervention of her famous father.



What kind of family is sketched here?

It revolves, naturally, around Mark Twain. The subject of Susy’s biography is a paragon, perfect except for his teeth; and what a moment she catches him at! Here is “papa,” just turned fifty, with birthday encomia arriving from famous writers around the world; here he is, publishing the memoirs of his friend Ulysses S. Grant, and arranging a personal audience for Susy; here he is, having just published a book called *Huckleberry Finn*, and writing one called *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. The family would have revolved around the father anyway, given the customs of the time; given in addition that he *is* Mark Twain, this was doubly certain.

With present good fortune comes apprehensiveness about the future, a quality not absent from Livy’s 1885 diary, and expressed more complexly by Mark Twain. He does not suppress a morbid strain in his accounts of the children’s dangers and narrow scrapes: the fires and dunkings and perilous heights, the near-tragedy in the Oat Bin. What are we to see in his small ghoulishnesses: the parent’s relief at having escaped the worst? Or is it showmanship, the will to keep us at the edge of our seats, like the spellbound audience of “The Golden Arm”? In Mark Twain’s case, can the two impulses even be distinguished?

The household religion, we gather, is essentially the religion of Livy’s family—endorsed, of course, by her husband, who seems to have

mutated his skepticism for the children's sake. It is a liberal and nearly demythologized faith; yet God is distinctly present to the children's minds. God has ordained whatever exists, and is allowed to stay up all night. The moral and ethical character of Jesus is stressed, and prayer is believed to be efficacious; but spiritualist innovations ("the Mind Cure") are also tried. Reverence is expected of the children, yet their naïve blasphemies are secretly enjoyed by the parents, and are treasured up in the book of "Small Foolishnesses." In Susy, the intellectual prodigy, we see a growing theological sophistication. In her observation that, as the Indians "were wrong" heretofore, *we* may be wrong now, she has rediscovered in her own person the suspension of dogmatic conclusions that defines liberal theology; from which follows naturally her minimalist prayer, simply "*that there may be a God—and a heaven—OR SOMETHING BETTER.*" Mark Twain watches her moral and intellectual development, fascinated.

Personal morals are strict. Corporal punishments—spanking ("the spat"), the punitive trip with the parent to "the bathroom"—are employed. Clara has a knack of enjoying her punishments; Susy's nervous intensity is already punishment enough. Lying is always wrong. ("They did not get this prejudice from me," Mark Twain comments.) The parents' campaign against the children's apparently innate mendacity is unsparing; when it finally takes effect, the girls "lean toward an almost hypercritical exactness"; a subtle revenge. The Golden Rule, attention to how the Other must feel, is consciously driven home.

The high moral tone is relieved occasionally by clowning, mostly instigated or inspired by Mark Twain. Susy enjoys and records her father's crude Western anecdotes, his homely ode to the donkey, and his parody (*she* thinks it is his) of the hymn "There is a happy land." Gentility and decency are tempered by these eruptions of frontier life, a life the girls knew and enjoyed—at second hand. The legend, for it was already that, of Mark Twain's life was a shared possession. With his raw Western youth counterpointing his respectable maturity, he seemed to straddle two worlds. Their own world, of genteel femininity, is sharply circumscribed,

after the fashion of the time. Clemens was not entirely facetious when he said of his daughters: "I have carefully raised them as young ladies who don't know anything and can't do anything."⁹ Being a lady excluded most gainful or useful employments; the Clemenses, progressive in many respects, were orthodox in this. But of course the girls were highly educated. With their mother and a series of tutors they studied music, history, languages (German, French, and Latin), and the sciences.

For all its value as a kind of group biography, this volume is far from complete. In the early 1890s, bad investments and business troubles drove Mark Twain to economize by moving the family to Europe; the Hartford house was shuttered, and the summers at Quarry Farm were no more. Information about the Clemenses' lives after these events is basically beyond the scope of this collection, and must be sought elsewhere. The sketches of the Clemenses in the Biographical Directory could be a jumping-off point. Neider's introduction (in *Papa*) contains information on Susy's later years. Clara published *My Father, Mark Twain* in 1931. Mark Twain chronicled his own life, private and public, in his unorthodox *Autobiography*; the Mark Twain Project is in the process of publishing a critical, annotated edition.¹⁰

One consequence of publishing these private and unpolished documents together is that there are repetitions or reduplications of several sayings or incidents. If the book is read straight through, Jean's theological perplexity about the ducks will be encountered three times; Rosina Hay will be identified on five separate occasions as a "German nurse"; and so forth. It has been thought better to accept these repetitions than to alter the texts; repetition is the very life of anecdote.

Brief explanations of some of the less readily grasped allusions will be found in About the Texts at the back of this volume, which also describes the manuscripts and their treatment by the editor. The Biographical Directory identifies persons, focusing on their relation to the Clemens family; it includes somewhat fuller entries on the Clemens family themselves.

The Mark Twain Project hopes that this publication will be welcome to

that elusive person to whom our author is so much indebted—the general reader; and that easy access to sound texts of these manuscripts will be useful to Mark Twain specialists, literary researchers, and historians of the family.

Benjamin Griffin
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NOTES

(Book titles abbreviated here are given in full in Works Cited.)

1. Lyon 1907, entry for 14 January.
2. Letter to William Dean Howells, 2 September 1874: *L6*, 217.
3. In his study of the manuscript of “A True Story,” Makoto Nagawara notes that some of these spatial effects are the result of careful revision (Nagawara 1989).
4. *AutoMT2*, 222.
5. On 12 August 1877, Livy wrote her husband from Quarry Farm:
This afternoon Susie and I had a rather sad time because she told me a lie—she felt very unhappy about it—This evening after her prayer I prayed that she might be forgiven for it, then I said ‘Susie don’t you want to pray about it and ask for your self to be forgiven?’ She said ‘Oh one is enough’—” (Mark Twain Papers).
6. This quotation, and the block quotation which follows it, are from the Susy Memorial Manuscripts, Box 31a, no. 4a (Mark Twain Papers). The quotation beginning “the dearest compliment . . .” is from “Small Foolishnesses”; see page 00.
7. Clemens spoke to his secretary Isabel Lyon of doing this even after he had quoted much of Susy’s book in his *Autobiography*:
Then after dinner when I had played the Lohengrin Wedding March 3 times while he lay curled up in a corner of the couch with his black cape wrapped about him, we talked a little about music, & then he talked about what he wants done with the parts of Susy’s biography of him as it appears in the *Autobiography*. When he is gone he would like to have it published in book form,—Susy’s biography of him & his comment upon it, for that will stand as a memorial of her (Lyon 1907, entry for 14 January).

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8. *AutoMT1*, 338.

9. Clemens made this remark in a statement before the Senate and House Committees on Patents, 7 December 1906; see *AutoMT2*, 338.

10. Clara Clemens 1931. A selective list of further reading on the Clemens family, or books of related interest, might start with Albert Bigelow Paine's authorized biography of Mark Twain (*MTB*), and continue with Lawton 1925; Harnsberger 1960 and 1982; Salsbury 1965; and Jerome and Wisbey 2013. "*The Loveliest Home That Ever Was*" (Courtney 2011) is a finely illustrated book on the Clemenses' Hartford house.