



My Papa,  
Mark Twain

Susy Clemens

We are a very happy family. We consist of Papa, Mamma, Jean, Clara and me. It is papa I am writing about, and I shall have no trouble in not knowing what to say about him, as he is a *very* striking character.

Papa's appearance has been described many times, but very incorrectly. He has beautiful gray hair, not any too thick or any too long, but just right; a Roman nose which greatly improves the beauty of his features; kind blue eyes and a small mustache. He has a wonderfully shaped head and profile. He has a very good figure—in short, he is an extraordinarily fine looking man. All his features are perfect except that he hasn't extraordinary teeth. His complexion is very fair, and he doesn't wear a beard. He is a very good man and a very funny one. He has got a temper, but we all of us have in this family. He is the loveliest man I ever saw or ever hope to see—and oh, so absentminded.

Papa's favorite game is billiards, and when he is tired and wishes to rest himself he stays up all night and plays billiards, it seems to rest his head. He smokes a great deal almost incessantly. He has the mind of an author exactly, some of the simplest things he can't understand. Our burglar alarm is often out of order, and papa had been obliged to take the mahogany room off from the alarm altogether for a time, because the burglar alarm had been in the habit of ringing even when the mahogany-room window was closed. At length he thought that perhaps the burglar alarm might be in order, and he decided to try and see; accordingly he put it on and then went down and opened the window; consequently the alarm bell rang, it would even if the alarm had been in order. Papa went despairingly upstairs and said to mamma, "Livy the

mahogany room won't go on. I have just opened the window to see."

"Why, Youth," mamma replied. "If you've opened the window, why of course the alarm will ring!"

"That's what I've opened it for, why I just went down to see if it would ring!"

Mamma tried to explain to papa that when he wanted to go and see whether the alarm would ring while the window was closed he *mustn't* go and open the window—but in vain, papa couldn't understand, and got very impatient with mamma for trying to make him believe an impossible thing true.

Papa has a peculiar gait we like, it seems just to suit him, but most people do not; he always walks up and down the room while thinking and between each course at meals.

Papa is very fond of animals particularly of cats, we had a dear little

gray kitten once that he named "Lazy" (papa always wears gray to match his hair and eyes) and he would carry him around

What evidence does the author provide to support her statement that Twain is fond of animals?

on his shoulder, it was a mighty pretty sight! the gray cat sound asleep against papa's gray coat and hair. The names that he has give our different cats are really remarkably funny, they are named Stray Kit, Abner, Motley, Fraeulein, Lazy, Buffalo Bill, Soapy Sall, Cleveland, Sour Mash, and Pestilence and Famine.

Papa uses very strong language, but I have an idea not nearly so strong as when he first married mamma. A lady acquaintance of his is rather apt to interrupt what one is saying, and papa told mamma he thought he should say to the lady's husband "I am glad your wife wasn't present when the Deity said Let there be light."

#### ◆ Build Vocabulary

**incessantly** (in ses' ent lē) *adv.*: Never ceasing

**consequently** (kän' si kwent' lē) *adv.*: As a result

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• Critical Viewing What details in the picture show that the Clemens family enjoy spending time together? [Analyze]



Papa said the other day, "I am a mugwump<sup>1</sup> and a mugwump is pure from the marrow out." (Papa knows that I am writing this biography of him, and he said this for it.) He doesn't like to go to church at all, why I never understood, until just now, he told us the other day that he couldn't bear to hear anyone talk but himself, but that he could listen to himself talk for hours without getting tired, of course he said this in joke, but I've no doubt it was founded on truth.

One of papa's latest books is "The Prince and the Pauper" and it is unquestionably the best book he has ever written, some people want him to keep to his old style, some gentleman wrote him, "I enjoyed Huckleberry Finn immensely and am glad to see that you have returned to your old style." That enoyed me,

1. **mugwump** (mug' wump') *n.*: A Republican who refused to support the candidates of the party in the 1884 election.

Susy is observing her two sisters in this picture. What do you think she might write about them in her journal? [Speculate]

that enoyed me greatly, because it troubles me to have so few people know papa, I mean really know him, they think of Mark Twain as a humorist joking at everything; "And with a mop of reddish brown hair which sorely needs the barbar brush, a roman nose, short stubby mustache, a sad care-worn face, with many crows' feet" etc. That is the way people picture papa, I have wanted papa to write a book that would reveal something of his kind sympathetic nature, and "The Prince and the Pauper" partly does it. The book is full of lovely charming ideas, and oh the language! It is *perfect*. I think that one of the most touching scenes in it is where the pauper is riding on horseback with his nobles in the "recognition procession" and he sees his mother oh and

then what followed! How she runs to his side, when she sees him throw up his hand palm outward, and is rudely pushed off by one of the King's officers, and then how the little pauper's conscience troubles him when he remembers the shameful words that were falling from his lips when she was turned from his side "I know you not woman" and how his grandeurs were stricken valueless and his pride consumed to ashes. It is a wonderfully beautiful and touching little scene, and papa has described it so wonderfully. I never saw a man with so much variety of feeling as papa has; now the "Prince and the Pauper" is full of touching places, but there is always a streak of humor in them somewhere. Papa very seldom writes a passage without some humor in

it somewhere and I don't think he ever will.

Clara and I are sure that papa played the trick on Grandma about the whipping that is related in "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer": "Hand me that switch." The switch hovered in the air, the peril was desperate—"My, look behind you Aunt!" The old lady whirled around and snatched her skirts out of danger. The lad fled on the instant, scrambling up the high board fence and disappeared over it.

What details about Twain's life do you learn in this section of the biographical account?

We know papa played "Hookey" all the time. And how readily would papa pretend to be dying so as not to have to go to school! Grandma wouldn't make papa go to school, so she let him go into a printing office to learn the trade. He did so, and gradually picked up enough education to enable him to do about as well as those who were more studious in early life.

#### Build Vocabulary

**consumed** (kən sōōmd') v.: Destroyed

## Guide for Reading

### Read and Respond

**Reader's Response** What questions would you still like answered about Mark Twain?

**Reader's Response** Describe the way Mark Twain works out a problem or puzzle.

**Reader's Response** Describe someone about whom you would like to write a biography.

### Check Your Comprehension

1. List three physical features that Susy includes in her description of her father.
2. Compare Susy's view of her father with the view she says the public sees.
3. Summarize Susy's feelings about *The Prince and the Pauper*.

### ◆ Critical Thinking

#### INTERPRET

1. How does Susy feel about her father's lack of formal education? Explain. **[Deduce]**
2. This essay contains many misspelled words. Why do you think it was published without correcting the errors? **[Speculate]**
3. What are three words you would use to describe Mark Twain? **[Synthesize]**

#### APPLY

4. Which of your traits would you want to have included in a biography about you? **[Make a Decision]**

#### EXTEND

5. In what jobs could Susy use her skills at observing people? **[Career Link]**