



## C H A P T E R 2 5

WHEN SUSY WAS THIRTEEN AND A SLENDER LITTLE MAID WITH copper-brown hair down her back and was perhaps the busiest person in the household, by reason of the many studies, health exercises and pleasures she had to attend to, she secretly and of her own motion and out of love added another task to her labors—the writing of a biography of me. She did this work in her bedroom at night and kept her record hidden. After a little, the mother discovered it and took it and let me see it; then told Susy what she had done and how pleased I was and how proud. I remember that time with a deep pleasure. I had had praise before but none that touched me like this; none that could approach it for value in my eyes. It has kept that place always since. As I read it now, after all these many years, it is still a king's message to me and brings me the same dear surprise it brought me then—with the sadness added of the thought that the eager and hasty hand that wrote it will never touch mine again—and I feel as the humble and unexpectant must feel when their eyes fall upon the paper that raises them to the ranks of the noble.

I cannot bring myself to change any line or word in Susy's picture of me but will introduce passages from it just as they came in their simplicity out of her honest heart, which was the beautiful heart of a child. What comes from that source has a charm and grace of its own which

may break all the recognized laws of literature, if it choose, and yet be literature still.

The spelling is frequently desperate but it was Susy's and it shall stand. I love it and to me it is gold. To correct it would mix it with impurities rather than refine it. It would spoil it. It would take from it its freedom and make it stiff and stylish. It is Susy's spelling and she was doing the best she could—and nothing could better it for me.

She learned languages easily; she learned history easily; she learned music easily; she learned all things easily, quickly and thoroughly except spelling. She even learned that after a while. But it would have grieved me but little if she had failed in it—for although good spelling was my one accomplishment I was never able to greatly respect it. That is my feeling yet. Before the spelling-book came with its rules and forms, men unconsciously revealed shades of their characters and also added enlightening shades of expression to what they wrote by their spelling, and so it is possible that the spelling-book has been of doubtful value to us.

Susy began the biography in 1885, when I was in the **fiftieth** year of my age, and she in the fourteenth of hers. She begins in this way:

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 had beautiful gray hair, not any too thick or too long, but just right; a Roman nose, which greatly improves the beauty of his features; kind blue eyes and a small mustache. He had a wonderfully shaped head and a very good figure—in short, he is an **extrodinarily** fine looking man. His skin is very fair, and he doesn't **ware** a beard. He is a very good man and a very funny man. 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 absent-minded. He does tell perfectly delightful stories....

Papa has a peculiar way of walking, it seems just to **sute** him, but most people do not; he always walks up and down the room while thinking and between each **coarse** at meals....

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 likely to **interrupt** what one is saying, and papa told mamma that he thought he should say to the lady's husband "I am glad your wife wasn't present when God said Let there be light."

It is as I have said before. This is a frank historian. She doesn't cover up one's faults but gives them an equal showing with one's handsomer qualities. Of course I made the remark which she has quoted—and even at this distant day I am still as much as half persuaded that if that lady mentioned had been present when the Creator said "Let there be light" she would have interrupted him and we shouldn't ever have got it.