

ARTHUR CHENEY TRAIN



THE "GOLDFISH"

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The "Goldfish"

Being the Confessions af a Successful Man

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CHAPTER I

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MYSELF

"My house, my affairs, my ache and my religion—"

I was fifty years old to-day. Half a century has hurried by since I first lay in my mother's wondering arms. To be sure, I am not old; but I can no longer deceive myself into believing that I am still young. After all, the illusion of youth is a mental habit consciously encouraged to defy and face down the reality of age. If, at twenty, one feels that he has reached man's estate he, nevertheless, tests his strength and abilities, his early successes or failures, by the temporary and fictitious standards of youth.

At thirty a professional man is younger than the business man of twenty-five. Less is expected of him; his work is less responsible; he has not been so long on his job. At forty the doctor or lawyer may still achieve an unexpected success. He has hardly won his spurs, though in his heart he well knows his own limitations. He can still say: "I am young yet!" And he is.

But at fifty! Ah, then he must face the facts! He either has or has not lived up to his expectations and he never can

begin over again. A creature of physical and mental habit, he must for the rest of his life trudge along in the same path, eating the same food, thinking the same thoughts, seeking the same pleasures—until he acknowledges with grim reluctance that he is an old man.

I confess that I had so far deliberately tried to forget my approaching fiftieth milestone, or at least to dodge it with closed eyes as I passed it by, that my daughter's polite congratulation on my demicentennial anniversary gave me an unexpected and most unpleasant shock.

"You really ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she remarked as she joined me at breakfast.

"Why?" I asked, somewhat resenting being thus definitely proclaimed as having crossed into the valley of the shadows.

"To be so old and yet to look so young!" she answered, with charming *voir-faire*.

Then I knew the reason of my resentment against fate. It was because I was labeled as old while, in fact, I was still young. Of course that was it. Old? Ridiculous! When my daughter was gone I gazed searchingly at myself in the mirror. Old? Nonsense!

I saw a man with no wrinkles and only a few crow's-feet such as anybody might have had; with hardly a gray hair on my temples and with not even a suggestion of a bald spot. My complexion and color were good and denoted vigorous health; my flesh was firm and hard on my cheeks; my teeth were sound, even and white; and my eyes were clear save for a slight cloudiness round the iris.

The only physical defect to which I was frankly willing to plead guilty was a flabbiness of the neck under the chin, which might by a hostile eye have been regarded as slightly double. For the rest I was strong and fairly well—not much inclined to exercise, to be sure, but able, if occasion offered, to wield a tennis racket or a driver with a vigor and accuracy that placed me well out of the duffer class.

Yes; I flattered myself that I looked like a boy of thirty, and I felt like one—except for things to be hereinafter noted—and yet middle-aged men called me "sir" and waited for me to sit down before doing so themselves; and my contemporaries were accustomed to inquire jocularly after my arteries. I was fifty! Another similar stretch of time and there would be no I. Twenty years more—with ten years of physical effectiveness if I were lucky! Thirty, and I would be useless to everybody. Forty—I shuddered. Fifty, I would not be there. My room would be vacant. Another face would be looking into the mirror.

Unexpectedly on this legitimate festival of my birth a profound melancholy began to possess my spirit. I had lived. I had succeeded in the eyes of my fellows and of the general public. I was married to a charming woman. I had two marriageable daughters and a son who had already entered on his career as a lawyer. I was prosperous. I had amassed more than a comfortable fortune. And yet—

These things had all come, with a moderate amount of striving, as a matter of course. Without them, undoubtedly I should be miserable; but with them—with reputation, money, comfort, affection—was I really happy? I was obliged to confess I was not. Some remark in Charles Reade's

Christie Johnstone came into my mind—not accurately, for I find that I can no longer remember literally—to the effect that the only happy man is he who, having from nothing achieved money, fame and power, dies before discovering that they were not worth striving for.

I put to myself the question: *Were* they worth striving for? Really, I did not seem to be getting much satisfaction out of them. I began to be worried. Was not this an attitude of age? Was I not an old man, perhaps, regardless of my youthful face?

At any rate, it occurred to me sharply, as I had but a few more years of effective life, did it not behoove me to pause and see, if I could, in what direction I was going?—to "stop, look and listen"?—to take account of stock?—to form an idea of just what I was worth physically, mentally and morally?—to compute my assets and liabilities?—to find out for myself by a calm and dispassionate examination whether or not I was spiritually a bankrupt? That was the hideous thought which like a deathmask suddenly leered at me from behind the arras of my mind—that I counted for nothing—cared really for nothing! That when I died I should have been but a hole in the water!

The previous evening I had taken my two distinctly blasé daughters to see a popular melodrama. The great audience that packed the theater to the roof went wild, and my young ladies, infected in spite of themselves with the same enthusiasm, gave evidences of a quite ordinary variety of excitement; but I felt no thrill. To me the heroine was but a painted dummy mechanically repeating the lines that some Jew had written for her as he puffed a reeking cigar in his

rear office, and the villain but a popinjay with a black whisker stuck on with a bit of pitch. Yet I grinned and clapped to deceive them, and agreed that it was the most inspiring performance I had seen in years.

In the last act there was a horserace cleverly devised to produce a convincing impression of reality. A rear section of the stage was made to revolve from left to right at such a rate that the horses were obliged to gallop at their utmost speed in order to avoid being swept behind the scenes. To enhance the realistic effect the scenery itself was made to move in the same direction. Thus, amid a whirlwind of excitement and the wild banging of the orchestra, the scenery flew by, and the horses, neck and neck, raced across the stage—without progressing a single foot.

And the thought came to me as I watched them that, after all, this horserace was very much like the life we all of us were living here in the city. The scenery was rushing by, time was flying, the band was playing—while we, like the animals on the stage, were in a breathless struggle to attain some goal to which we never got any nearer.

Now as I smoked my cigarette after breakfast I asked myself what I had to show for my fifty years. What goal or goals had I attained? Had anything happened except that the scenery had gone by? What would be the result should I stop and go with the scenery? Was the race profiting me anything? Had it profited anything to me or anybody else? And how far was I typical of a class?

A moment's thought convinced me that I was the prototype of thousands all over the United States. "A certain rich man!" That was me. I had yawned for years at dozens

of sermons about men exactly like myself. I had called them twaddle. I had rather resented them. I was not a sinner—that is, I was not a sinner in the ordinary sense at all. I was a good man—a very good man. I kept all the commandments and I acted in accordance with the requirements of every standard laid down by other men exactly like myself. Between us, I now suddenly saw, we made the law and the prophets. We were all judging ourselves by self-made tests. I was just like all the rest. What was true of me was true of them.

And what were we, the crowning achievement of American civilization, like? I had not thought of it before. Here, then, was a question the answer to which might benefit others as well as myself. I resolved to answer it if I could—to write down in plain words and cold figures a truthful statement of what I was and what they were.

I had been a fairly wide reader in my youth, and yet I did not recall anywhere precisely this sort of self-analysis. Confessions, so called, were usually amatory episodes in the lives of the authors, highly spiced and colored by emotions often not felt at the time, but rather inspired by memory. Other analyses were the contented, narratives of supposedly poverty-stricken people who pretended they had no desires in the world save to milk the cows and watch the grass grow. "Adventures in contentment" interested me no more than adventures in unbridled passion.

I was going to try and see myself as I was—naked. To be of the slightest value, everything I set down must be absolutely accurate and the result of faithful observation. I believed I was a good observer. I had heard myself

described as a "cold proposition," and coldness was a *sine qua non* of my enterprise. I must brief my case as if I were an attorney in an action at law. Or rather, I must make an analytical statement of fact like that which usually prefaces a judicial opinion. I must not act as a pleader, but first as a keen and truthful witness and then as an impartial judge. And at the end I must either declare myself innocent or guilty of a breach of trust—pronounce myself a faithful or an unworthy servant.

I must dispassionately examine and set forth the actual conditions of my home life, my business career, my social pleasures, the motives animating myself, my family, my professional associates, and my friends —weigh our comparative influence for good or evil on the community and diagnose the general mental, moral and physical condition of the class to which I belonged.

To do this aright, I must see clearly things as they were without regard to popular approval or prejudice, and must not hesitate to call them by their right names. I must spare neither myself nor anybody else. It would not be altogether pleasant. The disclosures of the microscope are often more terrifying than the amputations of the knife; but by thus studying both myself and my contemporaries I might perhaps arrive at the solution of the problem that was troubling me—that is to say, why I, with every ostensible reason in the world for being happy, was not! This, then, was to be my task.

* * * * *

I have already indicated that I am a sound, moderately healthy, vigorous man, with a slight tendency to run to fat. I

am five feet ten inches tall, weigh a hundred and sixty-two pounds, have gray eyes, a rather aquiline nose, and a close-clipped dark-brown mustache, with enough gray hairs in it to give it dignity. My movements are quick; I walk with a spring. I usually sleep, except when worried over business. I do not wear glasses and I have no organic trouble of which I am aware. The New York Life Insurance Company has just reinsured me after a thorough physical examination. My appetite for food is not particularly good, and my other appetites, in spite of my vigor, are by no means keen. Eating is about the most active pleasure that I can experience; but in order to enjoy my dinner I have to drink a cocktail, and my doctor says that is very bad for my health.

My personal habits are careful, regular and somewhat luxurious. I bathe always once and generally twice a day. Incidentally I am accustomed to scatter a spoonful of scented powder in the water for the sake of the odor. I like hot baths and spend a good deal of time in the Turkish bath at my club. After steaming myself for half an hour and taking a cold plunge, an alcohol rub and a cocktail, I feel younger than ever; but the sight of my fellow men in the bath revolts me. Almost without exception they have flabby, pendulous stomachs out of all proportion to the rest of their bodies. Most of them are bald and their feet are excessively ugly, so that, as they lie stretched out on glass slabs to be rubbed down with salt and scrubbed, they appear to be deformed. I speak now of the men of my age. Sometimes a boy comes in that looks like a Greek god; but generally the boys are as weird-looking as the men. I am rambling, however. Anyhow I am less repulsive than most of them. Yet,

unless the human race has steadily deteriorated, I am surprised that the Creator was not discouraged after his first attempt.

I clothe my body in the choicest apparel that my purse can buy, but am careful to avoid the expressions of fancy against which Polonius warns us. My coats and trousers are made in London, and so are my underclothes, which are woven to order of silk and cotton. My shoes cost me fourteen dollars a pair; my silk socks, six dollars; my ordinary shirts, five dollars; and my dress shirts, fifteen dollars each. On brisk evenings I wear to dinner and the opera a mink-lined overcoat, for which my wife recently paid seven hundred and fifty dollars. The storage and insurance on this coat come to twenty-five dollars annually and the repairs to about forty-five. I am rather fond of overcoats and own half a dozen of them, all made in Inverness.

I wear silk pajamas—pearl-gray, pink, buff and blue, with frogs, cuffs and monograms—which by the set cost me forty dollars. I also have a pair of pearl evening studs to wear with my dress suit, for which my wife paid five hundred and fifty dollars, and my cuff buttons cost me a hundred and seventy-five. Thus, if I am not an exquisite—which I distinctly am not—I am exceedingly well dressed, and I am glad to be so. If I did not have a fur coat to wear to the opera I should feel embarrassed, out of place and shabby. All the men who sit in the boxes at the Metropolitan Opera House have fur overcoats.

As a boy I had very few clothes indeed, and those I had were made to last a long time. But now without fine raiment I am sure I should be miserable. I cannot imagine myself

shabby. Yet I can imagine any one of my friends being shabby without feeling any uneasiness about it—that is to say, I am the first to profess a democracy of spirit in which clothes cut no figure at all. I assert that it is the man, and not his clothes, that I value; but in my own case my silk-and-cotton undershirt is a necessity, and if deprived of it I should, I know, lose some attribute of self.

At any rate, my bluff, easy, confident manner among my fellow men, which has played so important a part in my success, would be impossible. I could never patronize anybody if my necktie were frayed or my sleeves too short. I know that my clothes are as much a part of my entity as my hair, eyes and voice—more than any of the rest of me.

Based on the figures given above I am worth—the material part of me—as I step out of my front door to go forth to dinner, something over fifteen hundred dollars. If I were killed in a railroad accident all these things would be packed carefully in a box, inventoried, and given a much greater degree of attention than my mere body. I saw Napoleon's boots and waistcoat the other day in Paris and I felt that he himself must be there in the glass case beside me.

Any one who at Abbotsford has felt of the white beaver hat of Sir Walter Scott knows that he has touched part—and a very considerable part—of Sir Walter. The hat, the boots, the waistcoat are far less ephemeral than the body they protect, and indicate almost as much of the wearer's character as his hands and face. So I am not ashamed of my silk pajamas or of the geranium powder I throw in my bath. They are part of me.

But is this "me" limited to my body and my clothes? I drink a cup of coffee or a cocktail: after they are consumed they are part of me; are they not part of me as I hold the cup or the glass in my hand? Is my coat more characteristic of me than my house—my sleeve-links than my wife or my collie dog? I know a gentlewoman whose sensitive, quivering, aristocratic nature is expressed far more in the Russian wolfhound that shrinks always beside her than in the aloof, though charming, expression of her face. No; not only my body and my personal effects but everything that is mine is part of me—my chair with the rubbed arm; my book, with its marked pages; my office; my bank account, and in some measure my friend himself.

Let us agree that in the widest sense all that I have, feel or think is part of me—either of my physical or mental being; for surely my thoughts are more so than the books that suggest them, and my sensations of pleasure or satisfaction equally so with the dinner I have eaten or the cigar I have smoked. My ego is the sum total of all these things. And if the cigar is consumed, the dinner digested, the pleasure flown, the thought forgotten, the waistcoat or shirt discarded—so, too, do the tissues of the body dissolve, disintegrate and change. I can no more retain permanently the physical elements of my personality than I can the mental or spiritual.

What, then, am I—who, the Scriptures assert, am made in the image of God? Who and what is this being that has gradually been evolved during fifty years of life and which I call Myself? For whom my father and my mother, their fathers and mothers, and all my ancestors back through the

gray mists of the forgotten past, struggled, starved, labored, suffered, and at last died. To what end did they do these things? To produce me? God forbid!

Would the vision of me as I am to-day have inspired my grandfather to undergo, as cheerfully as he did, the privations and austerities of his long and arduous service as a country clergyman—or my father to die at the head of his regiment at Little Round Top? What am I—what have I ever done, now that I come to think of it, to deserve those sacrifices? Have I ever even inconvenienced myself for others in any way? Have I ever repaid this debt? Have I in turn advanced the flag that they and hundreds of thousands of others, equally unselfish, carried forward?

Have I ever considered my obligation to those who by their patient labors in the field of scientific discovery have contributed toward my well-being and the very continuance of my life? Or have I been content for all these years to reap where I have not sown? To accept, as a matter of course and as my due, the benefits others gave years of labor to secure for me? It is easy enough for me to say: No—that I have thought of them and am grateful to them. Perhaps I am, in a vague fashion. But has whatever feeling of obligation I may possess been evidenced in my conduct toward my fellows?

I am proud of my father's heroic death at Gettysburg; in fact I am a member, by virtue of his rank in the Union Army, of what is called The Loyal Legion. But have I ever fully considered that he died for me? Have I been loyal to him? Would he be proud or otherwise—*is* he proud or otherwise of me, his son? That is a question I can only answer after I have ascertained just what I am.

Now for over quarter of a century I have worked hard—harder, I believe, than most men. From a child I was ambitious. As a boy, people would point to me and say that I would get ahead. Well, I have got ahead. Back in the town where I was born I am spoken of as a "big man." Old men and women stop me on the main street and murmur: "If only your father could see you now!" They all seem tremendously proud of me and feel confident that if he could see me he would be happy for evermore. And I know they are quite honest about it all. For they assume in their simple hearts that my success is a real success. Yet I have no such assurance about it.

Every year I go back and address the graduating class in the high school—the high school I attended as a boy. And I am "Exhibit A"—the tangible personification of all that the fathers and mothers hope their children will become. It is the same way with the Faculty of my college. They have given me an honorary degree and I have given them a drinking fountain for the campus. We are a mutual-admiration society.

I am always picked by my classmates to preside at our reunions, for I am the conspicuous, shining example of success among them. They are proud of me, without envy. "Well, old man," they say, "you've certainly made a name for yourself!" They take it for granted that, because I have made money and they read my wife's name in the society columns of the New York papers, I must be completely satisfied.

And in a way I *am* satisfied with having achieved that material success which argues the possession of brains and

industry; but the encomiums of the high-school principal and the congratulations of my college mates, sincere and well-meaning as they are, no longer quicken my blood; for I know that they are based on a total ignorance of the person they seek to honor. They see a heavily built, well-groomed, shrewd-looking man, with clear-cut features, a ready smile, and a sort of brusque frankness that seems to them the index of an honest heart. They hear him speak in a straightforward, direct way about the "Old Home," and the "Dear Old College," and "All Our Friends"—quite touching at times, I assure you—and they nod and say, "Good fellow, this! No frills—straight from the heart! No wonder he has got on in the city! Sterling chap! Hurrah!"

Perhaps, after all, the best part of me comes out on these occasions. But it is not the *me* that I have worked for half a century to build up; it is rather what is left of the *me* that knelt at my mother's side forty years ago. Yet I have no doubt that, should these good parents of mine see how I live in New York, they would only be the more convinced of the greatness of my success—the success to achieve which I have given the unremitting toil of thirty years.

* * * * *

And as I now clearly see that the results of this striving and the objects of my ambition have been largely, if not entirely, material, I shall take the space to set forth in full detail just what this material success amounts to, in order that I may the better determine whether it has been worth struggling for. Not only are the figures that follow accurate and honest, but I am inclined to believe that they represent the very minimum of expenditure in the class of New York

families to which mine belongs. They may at first sight seem extravagant; but if the reader takes the trouble to verify them—as I have done, alas! many times to my own dismay and discouragement—he will find them economically sound. This, then, is the catalogue of my success.

I possess securities worth about seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars and I earn at my profession from thirty to forty thousand dollars a year. This gives me an annual income of from sixty-five thousand to seventy-five thousand dollars. In addition I own a house on the sunny side of an uptown cross street near Central Park which cost me, fifteen years ago, one hundred and twenty thousand dollars, and is now worth two hundred and fifty thousand. I could sell it for that. The taxes alone amount to thirty-two hundred dollars—the repairs and annual improvements to about twenty-five hundred. As the interest on the value of the property would be twelve thousand five hundred dollars it will be seen that merely to have a roof over my head costs me annually over eighteen thousand dollars.

My electric-light bills are over one hundred dollars a month. My coal and wood cost me even more, for I have two furnaces to heat the house, an engine to pump the water, and a second range in the laundry. One man is kept busy all the time attending to these matters and cleaning the windows. I pay my butler eighty dollars a month; my second man fifty-five; my valet sixty; my cook seventy; the two kitchen maids twenty-five each; the head laundress forty-five; the two second laundresses thirty-five each; the parlor maid thirty; the two housemaids twenty-five each; my wife's maid thirty-five; my daughter's maid thirty; the useful man

fifty; the pantry maid twenty-five. My house payroll is, therefore, six hundred and fifty dollars a month, or seventy-eight hundred a year.

We could not possibly get along without every one of these servants. To discharge one of them would mean that the work would have to be done in some other way at a vastly greater expense. Add this to the yearly sum represented by the house itself, together with the cost of heating and lighting, and you have twenty-eight thousand four hundred dollars.

Unforeseen extras make this, in fact, nearer thirty thousand dollars. There is usually some alteration under way, a partition to be taken out, a hall to be paneled, a parquet floor to be relaid, a new sort of heating apparatus to be installed, and always plumbing. Generally, also, at least one room has to be done over and refurnished every year, and this is an expensive matter. The guest room, recently refurnished in this way at my daughter's request, cost thirty-seven hundred dollars. Since we average not more than two guests for a single night annually, their visits from one point of view will cost me this year eighteen hundred and fifty dollars apiece.

Then, too, styles change. There is always new furniture, new carpets, new hangings—pictures to be bought. Last season my wife changed the drawing room from Empire to Louis Seize at a very considerable outlay.

Our food, largely on account of the number of our servants, costs us from a thousand to twelve hundred dollars a month. In the spring and autumn it is a trifle less—in winter it is frequently more; but it averages, with wine,

cigars, ice, spring water and sundries, over fifteen thousand dollars a year.

We rent a house at the seashore or in the country in summer at from five to eight thousand dollars, and usually find it necessary to employ a couple of men about the place.

Our three saddle-horses cost us about two thousand dollars for stabling, shoeing and incidentals; but they save me at least that in doctors' bills.

Since my wife and daughters are fond of society, and have different friends and different nightly engagements, we are forced to keep two motors and two chauffeurs, one of them exclusively for night-work. I pay these men one hundred and twenty-five dollars each a month, and the garage bill is usually two hundred and fifty more, not counting tires. At least one car has to be overhauled every year at an average expense of from two hundred and fifty to five hundred dollars. Both cars have to be painted annually. My motor service winter and summer costs on a conservative estimate at least eight thousand dollars.

I allow my wife five thousand dollars; my daughters three thousand each; and my son, who is not entirely independent, twenty-five hundred. This is supposed to cover everything; but it does not—it barely covers their bodies. I myself expend, having no vices, only about twenty-five hundred dollars.

The bills of our family doctor, the specialists and the dentist are never less than a thousand dollars, and that is a minimum. They would probably average more than double that.

Our spring trip to Paris, for rest and clothing, has never cost me less than thirty-five hundred dollars, and when it comes to less than five thousand it is inevitably a matter of mutual congratulation.

Our special entertaining, our opera box, the theater and social frivolities aggregate no inconsiderable sum, which I will not overestimate at thirty-five hundred dollars.

Our miscellaneous subscriptions to charity and the like come to about fifteen hundred dollars.

The expenses already recited total nearly seventy-five thousand dollars, or as much as my maximum income. And this annual budget contains no allowance for insurance, books, losses at cards, transportation, sundries, the purchase of new furniture, horses, automobiles, or for any of that class of expenditure usually referred to as "principal" or "plant." I inevitably am obliged to purchase a new motor every two or three years—usually for about six thousand dollars; and, as I have said, the furnishing of our city house is never completed.

It is a fact that for the last ten years I have found it an absolute impossibility to get along on seventy-five thousand dollars a year, even living without apparent extravagance. I do not run a yacht or keep hunters or polo ponies. My wife does not appear to be particularly lavish and continually complains of the insufficiency of her allowance. Our table is not Lucullan, by any means; and we rarely have game out of season, hothouse fruit or many flowers. Indeed, there is an elaborate fiction maintained by my wife, cook and butler that our establishment is run economically and strictly on a business basis. Perhaps it is. I hope so. I do not know

anything about it. Anyhow, here is the smallest budget on which I can possibly maintain my household of five adults:

ANNUAL BUDGET—MINIMUM—FOR FAMILY OF FIVE PERSONS

Taxes on city house \$ 3,200
Repairs, improvements and minor alterations 2,500
Rent of country house—average 7,000
Gardeners and stablemen, and so on 800
Servants' payroll 7,800
Food supplies 15,000
Light and heat—gas, electricity, coal and wood 2,400
Saddle-horses—board and so on 2,000
Automobile expenses 8,000
Wife's allowance—emphatically insufficient 5,000
Daughters' allowance—two 6,000
Son's allowance 2,500
Self—clubs, clothes, and so on 2,500
Medical attendance—including dentist 1,000
Charity 1,500
Travel—wife's annual spring trip to Paris 3,500
Opera, theater, music, entertaining at restaurants,
and so on 3,500

Total \$74,200

A fortune in itself, you may say! Yet judged by the standards of expenditure among even the unostentatiously wealthy in New York it is moderate indeed. A friend of mine who has only recently married glanced over my schedule