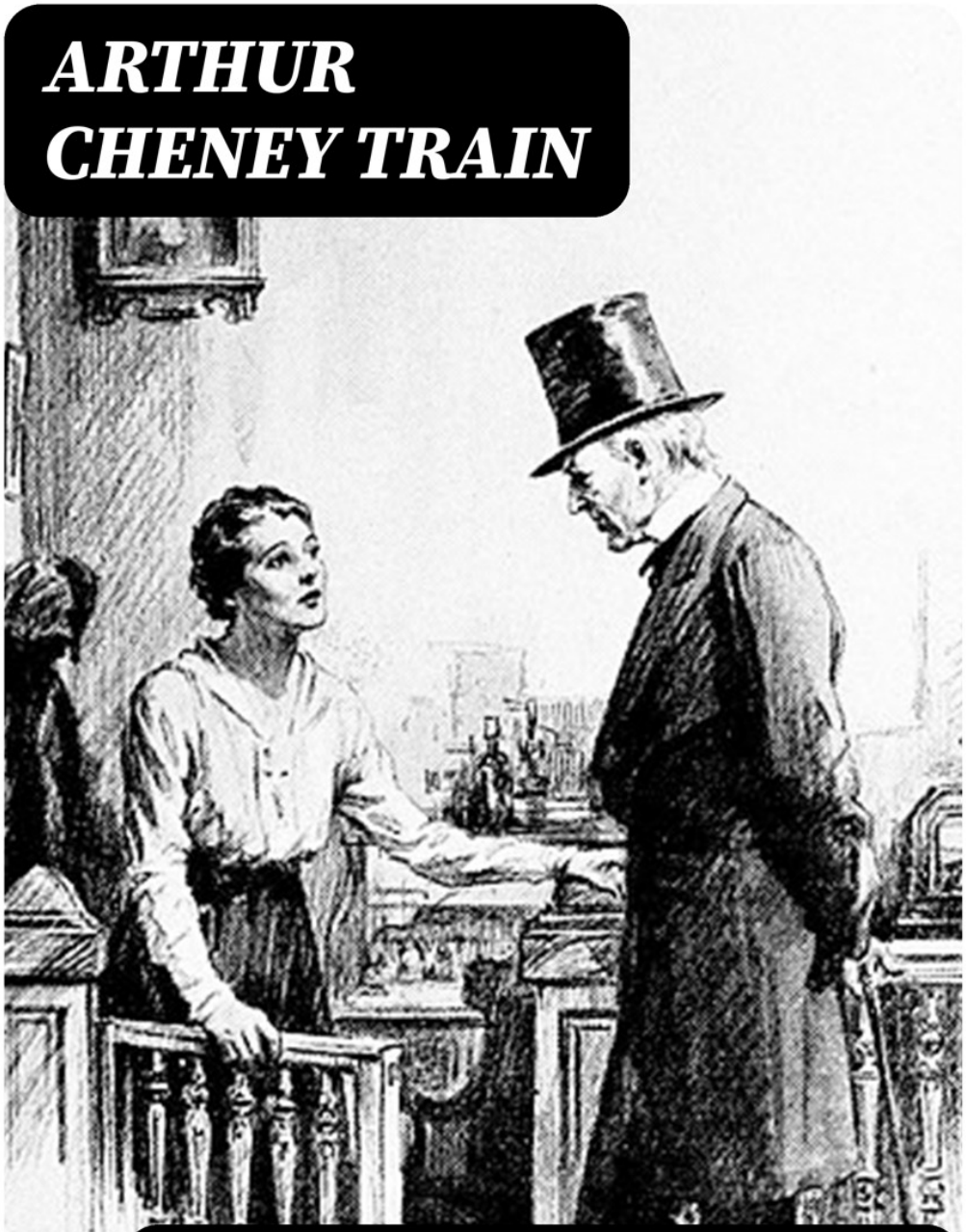
ARTHUR CHENEY TRAIN



THE CONFESSIONS OF ARTEMAS QUIBBLE

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CHAPTER I

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I was born in the town in Lynn, Massachusetts, upon the twenty- second day of February, in the year 1855. Unlike most writers of similar memoirs, I shall cast no aspersions upon the indigent by stating that my parents were poor but honest. They were poor *and* honest, as indeed, so far as I have been able to ascertain, have been all the Quibbles since the founder of the family came over on the good ship *Susan and Ellen* in 1635, and, after marrying a lady's maid who had been his fellow passenger, settled in the township of Weston, built a mill, and divided his time equally between selling rum to the Indians and rearing a numerous progeny.

My father, the Reverend Ezra Quibble, was, to be sure, poor enough. The salary that he received as pastor of his church was meagre to the degree of necessitating my wearing his over-worn and discarded clerical vestments, which to some extent may account for my otherwise inexplicable distaste for things ecclesiastical. My mother was poor, after wedlock, owing to the eccentricity of a parent who was so inexorably opposed to religion that he cut her off with a shilling upon her marriage to my father. Before this she had had and done what she chose, as was fitting for a daughter of a substantial citizen who had made a fortune in shoe leather.

I remember that one of my first experiments upon taking up the study of law was to investigate by grandfather's will in the probate office, with a view to determining whether or not, in his fury against the church, he had violated any of the canons of the law in regard to perpetuities or restraints upon alienation; or whether in his enthusiasm for the Society for the Propagation of Free Thinking, which he had established and intended to perpetuate, he had not been

guilty of some technical slip or blunder that would enable me to seize upon its endowment for my own benefit. But the will, alas! had been drawn by that most careful of draughtsmen, old Tuckerman Toddleham, of 14 Barristers' Hall, Boston, and was as solid as the granite blocks of the court-house and as impregnable of legal attack as the Constitution.

We lived in a frame house, painted a disconsolate yellow. It abutted close upon the sidewalk and permitted the passer-by to view the family as we sat at meat or enjoyed the moderate delights of social intercourse with our neighbors, most of whom were likewise parishioners of my father.

My early instruction was received in the public schools of my native town, supplemented by tortured hours at home with "Greenleaf's Mental Arithmetic" and an exhaustive study of the major and minor prophets. The former stood me in good stead, but the latter I fear had small effect. At any rate, the impression made upon me bore little fruit, and after three years of them I found myself in about the same frame of mind as the Oxford student who, on being asked at his examination to distinguish between the major and minor prophets, wrote in answer: "God forbid that I should discriminate between such holy men!"

But for all that I was naturally of a studious and even scholarly disposition, and much preferred browsing among the miscellaneous books piled in a corner of the attic to playing the rough-and-tumble games in which my school-mates indulged.

My father was a stern, black-bearded man of the ante-bellum type, such as you may see in any old volume of daguerreotypes, and entirely unblessed with a sense of humor. I can even now recall with a sinking of the heart the manner in which, if I abjured my food, he would grasp me firmly by the back of the neck and force my nose toward the plate of Indian mush—which was the family staple at supper

—with the command, "Eat, boy!" Sometimes he was kind to a degree which, by a yawning of the imagination, might be regarded as affectionate, but this was only from a sense of religious duty. At such times I was prone to distrust him even more than at others. He believed in a personal devil with horns, a tail, and, I suspect, red tights; and up to the age of ten I shared implicitly in this belief. The day began and ended with family prayers of a particularly long-drawn-out and dolorous character.

My mother, on the other hand, was a pale young woman of an undecided turn of mind with a distinct taste for the lighter pleasures that she was never allowed to gratify. I think she secretly longed for the freedom that had been hers under the broader roof of her father's stately mansion on High Street. But she had, I suspect, neither the courage nor the force of mind to raise an issue, and from sheer inertia remained faithful to the life that she had elected.

My grandfather never had anything to do with either of them and did not, so far as I am aware, know me by sight, which may account for the fact that when he died he bequeathed a moderate sum in trust, "the proceeds to be devoted to the support and maintenance of the child of my daughter Sarah, at some suitable educational institution where he may be removed from the influences of his father."

Thus it was that at the age of nine I was sent away from home and began an independent career at the boarding-school kept by the Reverend Mr. Quirk, at Methuen, Massachusetts. Here I remained for seven years, in the course of which both my parents died, victims of typhoid. I was cast upon the world utterly alone, save for the rather uncompromising and saturnine regard in which I was held by old Mr. Toddleham, my trustee. This antique gentleman inhabited a musty little office, the only furniture in which consisted of a worn red carpet, a large engraving of the Hon. Jeremiah Mason, and a table covered with green baize.

I recall also a little bronze horse which he used as a paper weight. He had a shrewd wrinkled face of the color of parchment, a thick yellow wig, and a blue cape coat. His practice consisted almost entirely in drawing wills and executing them after the decease of their respective testators, whom he invariably outlived, and I think he regarded me somewhat in the light of a legal joke. He used to send for me twice a year, for the sole purpose, I believe, of ascertaining whether or not I was sufficiently nourished at Quirk's establishment. On these occasions he would take me to lunch with him at the Parker House, where he invariably ordered scallops and pumpkin pie for me and a pint of port for himself.

On my departure he would hand me solemnly two of the pieces of paper currency known as "shin plasters," and bid me always hold my grandfather's memory in reverence. On one of these occasions, when he had laid me under a similar adjuration, I asked him whether he had ever heard of the man who made his son take off his hat whenever he met a pig—on the ground that his father had made his money in pork. He stared at me very hard for a moment with his little twinkling eyes and then suddenly and without any preliminary symptoms exploded in a cackle of laughter.

"Goddamme," he squeaked, "I wish your gran'ther could a' heard y' say that!"

Then without further explanation he turned and made his way down School Street and I did not see him for another six months.

My life at Quirk's was a great improvement over the life I had led at home in Lynn. In the first place I was in the real country, and in the second I had the companionship of good-natured, light- hearted people. The master himself was of the happy-go-lucky sort who, with a real taste for the finer things of literature and life, take no thought for the morrow or indeed even for the day. He was entirely incapable of earning a living and had been successively an

actor, a lecturer, a preacher, and a pedagogue. He was a fine scholar of Latin and could quote Terence, Horace, and Plautus in a way that could stir the somnolent soul even of a school-boy. His chief enemy, next to laziness, was drink. He would disappear for days at a time into his study, and afterward explain that he had been engaged in the preparation of his *magnum opus*, which periodically was just on the point of going to press.

During these interludes the school was run by Mrs. Quirk, a robust, capable, and rosy Englishwoman, who had almost as much learning as her husband and ten times as much practical ability. There were twelve boys in the school, for each of whom the Quirks received the modest sum of two hundred and seventy-five dollars a year. In exchange for this they gave board, lodging, and tuition. Each of us received separate instruction—or as Quirk expressed it "individual attention"—and excellent instruction it was. We arose at six, breakfasted at six-thirty, and helped around the house until eight, when our studies began. These continued until twelve, at which time we had dinner. After that we were free until two-thirty, when we resumed our labors until four.

Quirk was a tall, lank, loose-jointed man, with long black hair that lay well over his Byronic collar. He had a humorous eye and a cavernous mouth that was always twisting itself into grimaces, alternately side-splitting and terrifying. On occasions he would use the birch—and very thoroughly, too, as I have reason to remember —but he ruled us by fear of authority. For though he dressed like a clergyman, he always smelled strongly of stale cigar smoke, and his language at times was more forcible than is generally expected of a wearer of the cloth.

I dwelt with the Quirks, winter and summer, until I was able to pass my examinations for Harvard, which I did in the summer of 1871. My allowance had been gradually increased to meet my new expenses, and I entered the freshman class with an income sufficient to permit me to

dress suitably and enjoy myself in such simple ways as were in vogue among the collegians. But coming as I did, alone, from a small boarding-school, proved to be a great disadvantage, for I had all my friends to make after my arrival and I had neither the means nor the address to acquire ready-made social distinction. Thus it happened that I was very lonely during my first years in Cambridge; missed the genial companionship of my old friends, the Quirks, and seized every opportunity that offered for going back to Methuen.

I had grown into a tall, narrow-shouldered youth, with a high-arched nose between rather pale cheeks, and prominent ears. Though I could hardly flatter myself into the belief that I was handsome, I felt that my appearance had something of distinction and that I looked like a gentleman. I affected coats with long tails and a somewhat dandified style of waistcoat and neck-cloth, as well as a white beaver, much in favor among the "bloods" of those days. But this took most of my available cash, and left me little to expend in treating my fellow students at the tavern or in enjoying the more substantial culinary delights of the Boston hotels. Thus though I made no shabby friends I acquired few genteel ones, and I began to feel keenly the disadvantages of a lean purse. I was elected into none of the clubs, nor did I receive any invitations to the numerous balls given in Boston or even to those in Cambridge. This piqued my pride, to be sure, but only intensified my resolution to become a man of fashion on my own account. If my classmates could get on without me I felt that I could get on without them, and I resolutely declined to appreciate any social distinction that might artificially exist between a man born in Salem and one born in Lynn, although I now understand that such distinction exists, at least so far as Boston society is concerned. Consequently as time went on and I could achieve prominence in no other way, I sought consolation for the social joys denied by my betters in

acquiring the reputation of a sport. I held myself coldly aloof from the fashionable men of my class and devoted myself to a few cronies who found themselves in much the same position as my own. In a short time we became known as the fastest set in college, and our escapades were by no means confined to Cambridge, but were carried on with great impartiality in Boston and the neighboring towns.

We organized a club, which we called the Cock and Spur, and had a rat-pit and cock-fights in the cellar, on which occasions we invited out young actors from the Boston Museum and Howard Athenaeum stock companies. These in turn pressed us with invitations to similar festivities of their own, and we thus became acquainted with the half-world of the modern Athens, which was much worse for us, I trow, than would have been the most desperate society of our college contemporaries. There was a club of young actors that we used to frequent, where light comedy sketches and scenes from famous plays were given by the members, and in due time several of us were admitted to membership. Of these I was one and learned to do a turn very acceptably. On one occasion I took a small part upon the Boston Museum stage to fill the place made vacant by the illness of a regular member of the cast—an illness due in part to a carousal at the Cock and Spur the night before, in which he had come out second best.

We were a clever crew, however, and never gave the faculty reason to complain of any failure on our part to keep up in our studies. When examination time came we hired an impecunious coach and, retiring from the world, acquired in five days knowledge that our fellows had taken eight months to imbibe. It is true that the college at large viewed us with some disgust, but we chose to regard this as mere envy. That we were really objectionable must, however, be admitted, for we smoked cigars in the Yard, wore sky-blue pantaloons and green waistcoats, and cultivated little side whiskers of the mutton-chop variety; while our gigs and

trotters were constantly to be seen standing in Harvard Square, waiting for the owners to claim them and take the road.

On Sundays, when the decorous youths of Boston had retired to Beacon Street for their midday family feast of roast beef and baked beans, the members of the Cock and Spur might be observed in their white beaver hats driving countryward in chaises from the local livery stables, seated beside various fair ladies from the Boston stage or the less distinguished purlieus of the Cambridge chop-houses. At noon these parties would foregather at some country tavern and spend long afternoons singing, drinking, and playing draw poker and other games of chance; and occasionally we would fight a main of cocks in some convenient pig-pen.

But this sort of life took money, and I soon found myself borrowing freely from my associates, most of whom were young fellows from other States who had already come into their inheritances and had gone to Harvard to get rid of them under the most approved conditions. For these I came to stand as a sort of sponsor, and was looked up to by them as a devil of a fellow, for I swore picturesquely and had a belligerently unpleasant manner that was regarded as something quite out of the ordinary and distinguished. These youthful spendthrifts I patronized and taught the mysteries of a sporting life, and for a time it became quite smart for a fellow to have gone on one of "Quib's" notes. These notes, however, increased rapidly in number, and before long amounted to such a prodigious sum that they gave me great uneasiness.

My habits had become extravagant and careless. Having no money at all I took no heed of what I did with that of others, for I hardly believed that I could ever repay any of it. But I continued on in my luxurious ways, well knowing that any change in my mode of life would precipitate a deluge. The safety of my position lay in owing everybody, and in inducing each to believe that he would be the one person

ultimately or immediately to be paid. Moreover, I was now completely spoiled and craved so ardently the enjoyments in which I had indulged that I would never of myself have had the will to abjure them. I had gained that which I sought —reputation. I was accounted the leader of the fast set—the "All Knights" as we were known—and I was the envy and admiration of my followers. But this bred in me an arrogance that proved my undoing. It was necessary for me to be masterful in order to carry off the pose of leadership, but I had not yet learned when to conciliate.

It so happened that in the spring of my junior year my creditors became more than usually pressing, and at the same time a Jew by the name of Poco Abrahams began to threaten suit on a note of mine for two thousand dollars, which I had discounted with him for seven hundred and fifty. I made my usual demands upon my friends and offered to do them the favor of letting them go on some more of my paper, but without the usual result. I then discovered to my annoyance that a wealthy young fellow know as "Buck" de Vries, who had considered himself insulted by something that I had said or done, had been quietly spreading the rumor that I was a sort of hocus-pocus fellow and practically bankrupt, that my pretensions to fashion were ridiculous, and that I made a business of living off other people. Incidentally he had gone the rounds, and, owing to the rumors that he himself had spread, had succeeded in buying up most of my notes at a tremendous discount. These he lost no time in presenting for payment, and as they amounted to several thousand dollars my hope of reaching a settlement with him was small. In point of fact I was quite sure that he wanted no settlement and desired only revenge, and I realized what a fool I had been to make an enemy out of one who might have been an ally.

In this embarrassing situation I bethought me of old Mr. Toddleham, and accordingly paid him an unexpected visit at Barristers' Hall. It was a humid spring day, and I recall that

the birds were twittering loudly in the maples back of the Probate Office. As befitted my station at the time of year, I was arrayed in a new beaver and a particularly fanciful pair of rather tight trousers.

"Come in," squeaked Mr. Toddleham, and I entered easily.

The old lawyer peered quizzically at me from behind his square- boned spectacles.

"Oh," said he, "it's you, Master Quibble."

"The same, and your most obedient," I replied, letting myself fall gracefully into a chair and crossing my legs.

"You want money, I suppose?" he continued, after a few minutes, during which he inspected by get-up with some interest.

"Well," I commenced lightly, "the fact is I am rather pressed. I thought if you could make me a small advance out of my grandfather's legacy—"

"Legacy! What legacy?" he inquired.

"The legacy my grandfather left me."

"He left you no legacy," retorted the old gentleman. "Your grandfather, to whom you were once so considerate as to refer in my presence as a pig, left you no legacy. He directed that as long as you seemed to deserve it I should spend a certain sum on your maintenance and education."

"Gad!" I cried. "That puts me in a nice position!"

The old lawyer looked at me whimsically.

"My gay young man," he remarked finally, "the only position you occupy is one into which you have deliberately walked yourself. You come here in your fine clothes and your beaver hat and—excuse me—your whiskers, and you are surprised that there is no money forthcoming to pay your debts. Do not look astonished. I know and have known for a long time of your debts. I have followed your career with attention if not with edification. Even for the son of a Baptist minister you have done pretty well. However, life is life and everybody is not the same. I sha'n't judge you. I was a bit of a dog myself, although I don't look it now. But I can give you

no more money for game-cocks and cigars. It is time for you to start in and earn your own living—if you can. At the end of the term I will give you fifty dollars and a ticket to New York, or one hundred dollars and no ticket to anywhere. You will have to kick out for yourself. So fine a fellow," he added, "ought not to find it hard to get along. No doubt you could find some rich girl to marry you and support you in idleness."

I flushed with anger and sprang to my feet.

"I did not come here to be insulted!" I cried furiously.

Old Mr. Toddleham chuckled apologetically.

"Tut, tut! No offence. You won't find earning your living such an easy matter. Have you thought anything about what you'll do?"

"No," I answered, still indignant.

"How much do you owe?"

"About forty-eight hundred dollars."

"Damme!" muttered Mr. Tuckerman Toddleham. "More than you could earn in the first five years at the law!"

"See here," I interrupted, "do you seriously mean that except for fifty dollars or so there is nothing coming to me out of my grandfather's estate? Why, he was worth over a million!"

"That is exactly what I mean," he returned. "He left you nothing except an allowance for your education during your good behavior. He made me the judge. I'm your trustee and I can't conscientiously let you have any more money to drink up and gamble with. It's over and done with." He rapped with an air of finality on his desk with the little bronze horse.

"Who gets all the money?" I asked ruefully.

"The Society for the Propagation of Free Thinking," he answered, eyeing me sharply.

"I should think anything like that ought to be contrary to law!" I retorted. "It ought to be a crime to encourage atheism."

"It's a good devise under our statutes!" he answered dryly. "I suppose your own faith is beautiful enough, eh?"

I did not respond, but sat twisting my hat in my hands. Through the open window the soft damp odors of spring came in and mingled with the dusty smell of law books. So this was law! It suddenly struck me that I was taking the loss of over a million dollars very resignedly. How did I know whether the old boy was telling me the truth or not? He had drawn the will and got a good fee for it. Certainly he was not going to admit that there was anything invalid about it. Why not study law—I might as well do that as anything —and find out for myself? It was a game worth playing. The stakes were a million dollars and the forfeit nothing. As I looked around the little office and at the weazened old barrister before me, something of the fascination of the law took hold of me.

"I rather think I should like to study law myself," I remarked.

He looked at me out of the corners of his bead-like little eyes.

"And break your gran'ther's will, mebbe?" he inquired slyly.

"If I can," I retorted defiantly.

"That would be better than fighting cocks and frittering your time away with play actors," said he.

"Mr. Toddleham," I returned, "if I will agree to turn over a new leaf and give up my present associates, will you continue my allowance and let me stay on in Cambridge and study law?"

"If you will agree to enter my office and study under my supervision —yes."

Once more I glanced around the little room. Somehow the smell of decaying leather did not have the same fascination that it had exercised a few moments before. The setting sun sinking over the Probate Office entered the window and lingered on the stern old face of the Hon.