

THE SUCCESS-FOOLED^{*} SOCIETY

by Linda Patrick

IN EVERY culture, every era, there are standards which the would-be successful man must live up to. Each ethnic group places certain traits high on a pedestal clearly marked, "Coveted." In the barbarian tribe those traits were brute strength and lineage. If a man had been denied one by nature, he could rely upon the second, but in any case, one trait or the other was a necessity to the true man. Civilization broke down tribal lineage: groups became so large that the ways of the barbarian became cumbersome, and a new system of values had to be developed. In Greece, the first civilized country of the Western World, the traits most highly admired were keenness of mind and soundness of body. It was each individual's responsibility to himself and to his country to train his mind by participating in seminars, by reading as many books, prose or poetry, as he could obtain, and by attending the dramas of his day. The Greek man also participated in athletic events, building his body as well as his mind. With these changes came new concepts of the ideal man. In the feudal society the feudal lord or the knight was the "man of the day." In Italy the true man was a Catholic of noble birth. In Germany the warrior was hailed. The shrewd trader was envied in Spain and France, the merchant and nobleman in England. In each country the standards have been set, and the man who aspires to be a heroic image in the eyes of his countrymen tries to meet these standards.

In America today the standards are far more reasonable than those of other countries and other eras. We count titles of nobility for naught; we ignore one's religious convictions, feeling that these concern him and no one else; since we are peaceful men, we do not hail the warrior; in general, we simply do not care about *who* a man is as long as he owns the right objects and agrees with the right people. If one is interested in the standards which the successful American man must meet, I suggest he make a pilgrimage to the capitol of his state where there is erected a marble monument to the "Unknown Citizen."

In case such a pilgrimage is not possible, allow me to discuss briefly some of these standards. Unlike the requirements of success in other cultures, those of the American people are fairly easy to attain. All that one needs to do is follow the rules. First, the

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American man is agreeable. He does exactly what his employer directs and no more. He is faithful in supporting his union and agrees to strike for any cause which the leaders may deem worthy. He goes along with his friends, drinking with them though he really does not care for liquor and smoking with them though it makes him sneeze and cough. He lets his insurance company take the responsibility of providing for his family should he die. As long as he is able, he provides his family with the necessities of life: a mink for the wife and private schooling for the offspring. He owns what his neighbors own (whether he can afford it or not) and displays his possessions at bridge parties he would rather not give. He is loyal to the political party that his grandfather was loyal to (even though it does not stand for the same things it did in "grandpa's day"). All in all, the true American is a "good guy" who is loved by people who really are not so important, but hated by no one.

There it is. What could be easier? It seems that anyone with any ambition at all could achieve success as a man in America, yet I know of many who never quite make it. I regret to say that one of my dearest friends was just such a man. He was born to a poor family, the son of a cabinet maker, but in American lineage this is not of any consequence. He could have been an apprentice to his father and, after a few years of training, could have been well on his way up the ladder of success. He never understood though. When he could have been drinking with some influential people, he was strolling with beatniks, outcasts of his town. He never had a credit card or a checking account, and he never bought his wife a mink or sent his children to a private school. In fact, he never even married. He never had his life insured or put money in stocks or bonds. He never owned a car—never rode at all—except one time when he rode on the back of an ass. He never did have his direction in life right. As a friend of mine said, "Instead of climbing up, he climbed a cross." He never owned a thing except the coat on his back—someone took that right before he died—and he was laid in a borrowed grave. It is strange though: some people consider him the most successful man in America, even on earth.

Funny thing, . . .