

APPENDIX - I

The full text of the passage as it appears in the textbook.

THE FALLACY OF SUCCESS

G.K. Chesterton

There has appeared in our time a particular class of books and articles which I sincerely and solemnly think may be called the silliest ever known among men. They are much more wild than the wildest romances of chivalry and much more dull than the dullest religious tract. Moreover, the romances of chivalry were at least about chivalry; religious tracts are about religion. But these things are about nothing; they are about what is called Success. In every book-stall, in every magazine, you may find works telling people how to succeed. They are books showing men how to succeed in everything; they are written by men who cannot even succeed in writing books. To begin with, of course, there is no such thing as success. Or, if you like to put it so, there is nothing that is not successful. That a thing is successful merely means that it is a millionaire is successful in being a millionaire and a donkey in being a donkey. Any live man has succeeded in living; and a dead man many have succeeded in committing suicide. But passing over the bad logic and bad philosophy in the phrase, we may take it, as these writers do, in the ordinary sense of success in obtaining money or worldly position. These writers profess to tell the ordinary man how he may succeed in his trade or speculation — how, if he is a builder, he may succeed as a builder; how, if he is a stockbroker, he may succeed, as a stockbroker. They profess to show him how, if he is a grocer, he may become a sporting yachtsman; how, if he is a tenth-rate journalist, he may become a peer, and how, if he is a German Jew, he may become an Anglo-Saxon. This is a definite and business-like proposal, and I really think that the people who buy these books (if any people do buy them) have a moral, if not a legal, right to ask for their money back. Nobody would dare to publish a book about electricity which literally told one nothing about electricity; no one would dare to publish an article on botany which showed that the writer did not know which end of a plant grew in the earth. Yet our modern world is full of books about Success and successful people which literally contain no kind of idea, and scarcely any kind of verbal sense.

It is perfectly obvious that in any decent occupation (such as brick laying or writing books) there are only two ways (in any special sense) of succeeding. One is by doing very good

work, the other is by cheating. Both are much too simple to require any literary explanation. If you are in for the high jump, either jump higher than anyone else, or manage somehow to pretend that you have done so. If you want to succeed at whist either be a good whist-player, or play with marked cards. You may want a book about jumping; you may want a book about whist; you may want a book about cheating at whist. But you cannot want a book about Success. Especially you cannot want a book about Success such as those which you can now find scattered by the hundred about the book-market. You may want to jump or to play cards; but you do not want to read wandering statements to the effect that jumping is jumping, or that games are won by winners. If these writers, for instance, said anything about Success in jumping it would be something like this : 'The jumper must have a clear aim before him — He must desire definitely to jump higher than the other men who are in for the same competition. He must let no feeble feelings of mercy prevent him from trying to do his best. He must remember that a competition in jumping is distinctly competitive, and that, as Darwin has gloriously demonstrated, "THE WEAKEST GO TO THE WALL." That is the kind of thing the book would say, and very useful it would be, no doubt, if read out in low and tense voice to a young man just about to take the high jump. Or suppose that in the course of intellectual rambles the philosopher of Success dropped upon our other case, that of playing cards, his bracing advice would run : "In playing cards it is very necessary to avoid the mistake of permitting your opponent to win the game. You must have grit and snap and go in to win. The days of idealism and superstition are over. We live in a time of science and hard common sense, and it has now been definitely proved that in any game where two are playing 'IF ONE DOES NOT WIN THE OTHER WILL'. It is all very stirring, of course, but I confess that if I were playing cards would rather have some decent little books which told me the rules of the game. Beyond the rules of the game it is all a question either of talent or dishonesty; and I will undertake to provide either one or the other — which, it is not for me to say.

Turning over a popular magazine, I find a queer and amusing example. There is an article called, "The Instinct that Makes People Rich. It is decorated in front with a

formidable portrait of Lord Rothschild. There are many definite methods, honest and dishonest, which make people rich; the only 'instinct', I know of which does it is that instinct which theological Christianity crudely describes as 'the sin of avarice'. That, however, is beside the present point. I wish to quote the following exquisite paragraphs as a piece of typical advice as to how to succeed. It is so practical; it leaves so little doubt about what should be our next step.

'The name of Vanderbilt is synonymous with wealth gained by modern enterprise. "Cornelius", the founder of the family, was the first of the great American magnates of commerce. He started as the son of a poor farmer; he ended as a millionaire twenty times over.

'He had the money-making instinct. He seized his opportunities, the opportunities that were given by the application of the steam-engine to ocean traffic, and by the birth of railway locomotion in the wealthy but undeveloped United States of America, and consequently he amassed an immense fortune.

'Now it is, of course, obvious that we cannot all follow exactly in the footsteps of this great railway monarch. The precise opportunities that fell to him do not occur to us. Circumstances have changed. But, although this is so, still, in our own sphere and in our own circumstances, we can follow his general methods; we can seize these opportunities that are given to us, and give ourselves a very fair chance of attaining riches.'

I look / reverently at the portrait of Lord Rothschild! I read reverently about the exploits of Mr. Vanderbilt. I know that I cannot turn every thing I touch to gold; but then I also know that I have never tried, having a preference for other substances, such as grass, and good wine. I know that these people have certainly succeeded in something; that they have certainly overcome somebody; I know that they are kings in a sense that no men were ever kings before; that they create markets and bestride continents. Yet it always seems to me that there is some small domestic fact that they are hindering, and I have sometimes thought I heard upon the wind the laughter and whisper of the reeds.

At least, let us hope that we shall all live to see these absurd books about Success covered with a proper derision and neglect. They do not teach people to be Successful, but they do teach people to be snobbish; they do spread a sort of evil poetry of worldliness. The Puritans are always denouncing books that inflame lust : what shall we say of books that inflame the viler passions of avarice and pride ? A hundred years ago we had the ideal of the Industrious Apprentice; boys were told that by thrift and work they would all become Lord Mayors. This was fallacious, but it was manly, and had a minimum of moral truth. In our society, temperance will not help him to respect himself. Good work will not make him a rich man, but good work may make him a good workman. The Industrious Apprentice rose by virtues few and narrow indeed, but still virtues. But what shall we say of the gospel preached to the new Industrious Apprentice; the Apprentice who rises not by his virtues, but avowedly by his vices ?

