Historical Papers
Communications historiques

Samuel Smiles and the Pursuit of Success in Victorian Britain

Timothy Travers

Volume 6, numéro 1, 1971

St. John 1971

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030463ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/030463ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0068-8878 (imprimé)
1712-9109 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Travers, T. (1971). Samuel Smiles and the Pursuit of Success in Victorian Britain. *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, *6*(1), 154–168. https://doi.org/10.7202/030463ar

SAMUEL SMILES AND THE PURSUIT OF SUCCESS IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

TIMOTHY TRAVERS
University of Calgary

Samuel Smiles occupies a curious position in the historiography of the 19th Century Britain. Modern Studies of the Victorian era usually feel obliged to mention Smiles' best known book, *Self-Help* (1859), because of its great popularity (some quarter of a million copies printed by the turn of the century), and because his ideal of 'self-help' seemed to be unusually representative of mid-Victorian culture. However, there have been no full length critical studies of Smiles and his message, and so his reputation has had to rest on a limited apprehension of a small percentage of the material available. Perhaps because of this, or because we of the 20th Century tend to equate hard work with the pursuit of success, Smiles has been seen as an author of how to succeed stories, a sort of British Horatio Alger.

The purpose of this paper will therefore be, firstly, to present the current interpretation of Samuel Smiles as an exponent of success in life; secondly, to challenge that interpretation and present a different assessment of the meaning of Smiles' concept of self-help; and thirdly, to suggest one way in which 'self-help' did correspond to the message of the so-called mid-Victorian 'success' literature.[1]

* * *

The current interpretation of Smiles may be quickly gleaned from a random selection of recent books. For example, J. F. C. Harrison in his *Learning and Living* (London, 1961), pp. 204-205, and Harold Perkin in his *Origins of Modern English Society* (London, 1969), p. 225, see Smiles' book *Self-Help* as, respectively, a "piece of success literature;" and as putting forward the myth of the self-made man; and both cite the same passage from *Self-Help:* "what some men are, all without difficulty might be. Employ the same means, and the same results will follow." But perhaps this quotation should have been continued: "That there should be a class of men who live by their daily labour in every country is the ordinance of God, and doubtless is a wise and righteous one; but that this class should be otherwise than frugal, contented, intelligent, and happy, is not the design of Providence. . . ." Here Smiles is evidently referring not to the pursuit of success, but to a state of relative contentment.

To emphasize this interpretation of Smiles as a success author, there can be found similar statements in other recent works: Robin Winks' edited *Age of Imperialism* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1969), p. 72, in which Smiles is regarded as the "British Horatio Alger;" T. K. Derry and T. L. Jarman, *The Making of Modern Britain, Life and Work from George III to Elizabeth II* (Collier Books edition; New York, 1962), p. 171, in which Smiles "used the careers of the earlier industrial pioneers to point an attractive road to fortune; . . ." Raymond Chapman, *The Victorian Debate: English Literature and Society, 1832-1901* (London, 1968), pp. 41 and 231, in which Smiles stands for "personal [financial] betterment," and an "optimistic assertion that all was well" (the latter a particularly erroneous notion); Walter D. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven and London, 1957), p. 191, who sees *Self-Help* as "Samuel Smiles' handbook to success; . . ." David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (Yale Paperbound edition; New Haven, 1961), pp. 92, 149, considers Smiles' output as "success biographies;" R. D. Altick, *Lives and Letters, A History of Literary Biography in England and America* (New York, 1969), p. 88, which considers Smiles as the "great master" of the Victorian "literature of success" and J. T. Ward, *The Factory System,* vol. I (Newton Abbot, 1970), p. 82, in which Smiles was seen as encouraging Victorian operatives to "follow the road of the self-made industrialists." The list could easily be extended, but it seems evident that Smiles is normally thought of as encouraging the pursuit of success — success here being defined as either the pursuit of fortune or of a higher social status.[2]

* * *

Now, while it can be said that those in Victoria Britain who wanted to advance socially and economically could and did find encouragement in Smiles' numerous books and articles, and although it is true that Smiles was often contradictory and sometimes seemed indeed to be encouraging a simple pursuit of success; it is also true that the main thrust of his philosophy was aimed at other motives and other values.

It is clear, for instance, that Smiles was not interested in encouraging the acquisition of wealth. Like another lapsed Calvinist, Carlyle, Smiles disliked the 'cash-nexus' form of society, and in an early article for the *Leeds Times* in 1842, Smiles criticised the widespread spirit of "money-getting:"

> Self is the god which the nation worships; cash payment is the principal bond which now links men together. The prevailing principle is *self* — self in all its intenseness. It prevails among all classes, and

> manifests itself in the spirit of competition which now tears society asunder. All are eager to be first — not first in moral worth and excellence, but in Money. Thus brothers struggle against brothers, heart-burnings are engendered between families, classes war against classes, and all suspect, despise, and fight against each other. There is scarcely one solitary spot in the social system, which this intense money-getting spirit has not invaded and polluted.[3]

And again: "The inordinate desire for selfish aggrandisement and for mere grovelling lucre-making, is a moral cancer which is now eating into the very heart of the community. It threatens to break up the entire social system. . . ." The desire for gain also had many side-effects, for the "love of MONEY . . . when set above all others, and made the main business of life, involves a horrid tear and wear of the human heart, is withering to all social enjoyments, and inflicts on society . . . the most deadly mischiefs and calamities." It was clear that Smiles did not admire the spirit of acquisition and did not see the attainment of wealth as evidence of moral virtue either — as he wrote in *Self-Help:* "Riches are no proof whatever of moral worth. . . ."[4]

Nor did Smiles encourage the other aspect of success; the effort to achieve a higher social status. Education, for example, was to be seen "not as a means of raising up a few clever and talented men into a higher rank of life — but of *elevating and improving the whole class* — of elevating the entire condition of the working man." What was to be elevated was the "condition" and not the "rank."[5]

This was, in fact, a fairly common sentiment in the 1840's and earlier. For example, the Rev. Thomas Milner, a writer for the Religious Tract Society, believed that the object of education was

> not to raise the manual labour classes above their condition, but to raise the condition itself. There have been striking examples, indeed, of individuals ascending from the depths of society to stations of ease and affluence by the cultivation of their native powers of mind; but it is false philanthropy to parade such examples before . . . the poor, to awaken aspiration and expectancy . . . [for] while one succeeds, the thousands must necessarily fail, and is the way to foster discontent.[6]

Smiles was actually thinking in terms of a society which was largely static in regard to individual social mobility, but which was open to the mental and moral advances of the entire working class. In any case, the mobility of the working class as a whole was limited by the naturally (and divinely) ordered human condition. "The great majority of men," wrote Smiles, "in all times, however enlightened, must necessarily be engaged in the ordinary advocations of industry;

and no degree of culture which can be conferred upon the community will ever enable them — even were it desirable, which it is not — to get rid of the daily work of society, which must be done."[7]

Smiles' ideas on work and society were reinforced by the lectures of Dr. John Fletcher which he attended as a medical student in the 1830's at Edinburgh.[8] Fletcher's lectures were significant because they presented to Smiles the traditional picture of nature as a stable framework of structures fitted for the activities of man. Fletcher believed that because of the harmony of the laws of nature under the design of God, each species reached its appointed place in the great chain of being.[9] Smiles was thus educated to think in terms of a static framework (either of nature or of a social class structure) within which man actively went about the business of improving himself and his condition, and thereby his society, but was not encouraged to move outside his "sphere" of life.

Furthermore, Smiles had been trained as a Calvinist in his youth,[10] and he frequently followed Calvin's concept of a fixed "calling" in his advice to young men. Thus Smiles used a 'Providential' terminology when stating several times in *Self-Help* that man should be satisfied to work on in that sphere of life which God had allotted to him. The chief object of culture was "to enlarge our individual intelligence, and render us more useful and efficient workers in the sphere of life to which we may be called." The benefactors of England were those who were "content simply to do the work they have been appointed to do. . . . " Respectability, for example, was not outward show, but simply going "patiently onward in the condition of life in which it has pleased God to call us. . . ."[11]

Hence, just as the theory of evolution was hindered by a belief in a rigid chain of being and the divinely ordered structure of nature, equally Smiles' Calvinist background and education led him to think of a largely static structure of society, based upon divinely ordered purpose and placed against the reliable framework of nature. And just as Darwin was able to overcome this inertia, so too did Smiles. But when Smiles discussed the evolution of the working class, it did not lead to an emphasis on social mobility, rather he emphasised self-culture and self-education, which was not "a means of getting past others in the world" but "a power to elevate the character and expand the spiritual nature. . . ."[12]

If financial success and social mobility, then, were not the aims of Smiles' message, what *was* the meaning of his concept of self-help? It seems that there were five main considerations in his mind, which again had very little to do with the pursuit of success as defined above.

First, Smiles meant by self-help that the working classes in particular should help themselves, not to wealth or social status, but to a position of moral and financial independence. As previously remarked, Smiles chiefly wanted the working classes to be "frugal, contended, intelligent and happy."[13]

Second, Smiles meant by self-help the self-culture and self-education of the individual.

Third, Smiles meant by self-help the development of the character of the individual. This was the most important element of self-help to him, witness the sub-title of his book, *Self-Help* — "with Illustrations of Character and Conduct." In fact he spent a good deal of time discussing the character which various people were forced to develop in the arduous pursuit of art, science, business, etc.; but very little time discussing the material results of such hard work, unless it be of a socially useful nature, such as invention or scientific discovery. His attitude is perfectly summarised in the final sentence of his preface to the 1866 edition of *Self-Help:* "But it is not the result in any case that is to be regarded so much as the aim and the effort, the patience, the courage, and the endeavour with which desirable and worthy objects are pursued." In other words, it was the pursuit and not the prize that mattered — the formation of character rather than the reward.

Fourth, Smiles meant to suggest by self-help a possible solution to the ills of society and the condition of the working classes.

Fifth and last, Smiles' concept of self-help was meant to encourage a natural aristocracy of merit and behaviour (called in Victorian times 'nature's gentlemen') — those self-helping and self-educated engineers and inventors and men of culture who would undercut the idle and undeserving born aristocracy by pursuing socially beneficial careers. This was the one group that Smiles allowed to achieve specific results — i.e. scientific discovery or invention, or the development of a new industry. But again this was not an encouragement of success *per se,* but for the especial purpose of benefitting human society, and, in particular, the provision of employment for the working class.

It will be useful to review the last four points in order to fully appreciate the concept of 'self-help.'

Firstly, many mid-Victorians emphasised self-culture and self-education (once termed by Henry Mayhew that "teachy preacy fever") but to a considerable extent Smiles obtained his ideas on self-culture and self-education from the Boston Unitarian, W. E. Channing. Smiles thought Channing's message was that "man is worth more than wealth or show, . . ." and that therefore the important thing was not rank or class, but the common nature that lies below there:

> [A]nd we are beginning to learn that every being . . . has noble powers to cultivate. . . . The grand idea of humanity, of the importance of man as man, is spreading. . . . [T]hat every human being should have the means of self-culture, of progress in knowledge and virtue, . . . of exercising the powers and affections . . . — this is slowly taking its place, as the highest social truth.[14]

This idea of self-culture and self-education was to play an important role in Smiles' thought, for his concept of self-help was permeated with the belief that every individual was capable of improving himself intellectually and morally, and should be encouraged to do so, because every individual contained within himself the divinely granted power of his faculties. Nevertheless, the effect of this progressive Unitarian emphasis on self-culture had a reverse side too, for it placed the stress on the mental development of the individual and de-emphasised the question of social conditions or indeed of social mobility and financial gain.

Secondly, self-culture and self-education led on, in a natural evolution, to Smiles' emphasis on character. In whatever path of life the character was formed, Smiles considered it to be the chief object of endeavour in life. Consequently character counted for more than material success:

> The truest test of success in life is Character. Has a man built up not a fortune, but a well-disciplined, well-regulated character? Has he acquired, not mere gold or acres, but virtue, benevolence and wisdom? . . . That is the only true test of a man.

Smiles enlarged on his appreciation of the importance of character:

> The highest object of life we take to be to form a manly character, and to work out the best development possible, of body and spirit — of mind, conscience, heart and soul. This is the end: all else ought to be regarded but as the means. Accordingly, that is not the most successful life in which a man gets the most pleasure, the most money, the most power or place, honour or fame, but that in which a man gets the most manhood, and performs the greatest amounts of useful work and of human duty.[15]

And in writing his self-help stories it was ultimately character that interested Smiles. While working on a brief biography of James Watt in 1857, he wrote to a friend: "What appears to persons who are intimate with distinguished men, to be *trifles,* really, when properly interwoven with the narration of such men's lives, constitute one of the charms of biography. For trifles often indicate *character,* which is the main thing to be delineated."[16]

Why was character and not material success so important to Smiles? Because he had been trained in his youth as a Calvinist, and as R. H. Tawney once remarked: to the Calvinist "character is all and circumstance nothing. . . ." Moreover, the formation of a well-disciplined character indicated to Smiles that strong underlying principles must also have been developed during the process — principles that would ensure the self-disciplined performance of such socially useful and Calvinistic virtues as work, duty and perseverence in one's calling.[17]

Nor was Smiles alone in emphasising character and conduct, for many Victorian moralists made the link between religious principle and industrious conduct. James Alexander, for example, in his *The Young Man in Business Cheered and Counselled* (1861) called for "PRINCIPLE" — one who acts from "a heart spring of perennial conviction as to duty. He is principled by intelligent conscientiousness. He works by rule. He carries within a little chart and compass of right and wrong." And in *The Moral and Religious Duties of Public Companies* (1856), J. W. Gilbart compared men and companies: "Fixed rules and regulations are to a public company what habits are to an individual; they insure a uniformity of conduct."[18]

Smiles was not so obvious in linking character, conduct, and business requirements, since he clearly thought that self-culture and character formation was of great importance for its own sake. Yet he also saw a utilitarian function for the moral reform implicit in the formation of an ideal character — namely, that moral reform was also the key to social reform.

Thirdly, therefore, Smiles considered that individual moral reform (the reformation of character and conduct) could solve social problems. Again this was not an unusual position; among many others, Harriet Martineau, Thomas Arnold, Carlyle, and various religious groups all hoped for some kind of moral reform of society — which would in turn resolve social problems.

Smiles came to think that the unhappy condition of the working class was, as he wrote in *Thrift (1875),* "the result of moral causes" and that therefore "the end of all reform is the improvement of the individual. Everything that is wrong in society results from that which is wrong in the individual. When men are bad, society is bad."[19] Moreover, Smiles believed with the Utilitarians, that the nation was only the sum of its individuals, so evidently the way to reform society was to reform a sufficient number of individuals. With this solution in mind, Smiles had recourse to his inherited value system, and thus proposed the improvement of society through the old moral virtues as expressed in the phrase 'Heaven helps those who help themselves.' As he noted, this advice was as old-fashioned "as the Proverbs of Solomon," but, in a Divinely-ruled and rational world of cause and effect, if men could be brought to an habitual reliance on a spirit of self-help, everything else would follow.

More surprising, perhaps, is that Smiles' encouragement registered some success, as the surviving evidence indicates. One letter to Smiles claimed that *Self-Help* "came in the nick of time. I read it, and pondered over it until it seized entire hold of me. . . ." Another wrote that the book "helped me to a new life and I now look upon it as my prayer book. Because every time I read it I feel as if I have been born anew." Yet another letter from a grateful father reports that his son's reading of *Self-Help* "has been the cause of an entire alteration in his mode of life. . . ." And in the same vein a reader mentions that *Character* did him more good than "all the Sermons I have heard, for years" and promised to follow Smiles' examples and "obey the precepts there laid down. . . ."[20] The parallel to the way in which religious conversion alters a person's entire life (as with the Methodists) is clear, and the end result was theoretically much the same, industry and temperance instead of idleness and drunkeness.

Fourth and lastly, self-help meant that the character of the individual was reflected so clearly in his or her external behaviour that the individual could be readily identified as belonging to a meritocracy — an *élite* of merit rather than of birth or class. Indeed Smiles seems in *Self-Help* to be trying to find an *élite* composed of men of all classes, those men of character who had improved the quality of life in the country during their careers, besides developing their own faculties and character. This position is curiously similar to Matthew Arnold's attempt to find a special "remnant" from among the three classes, who would not be subservient to habits of their class, but by perfecting their best

selves would help to influence the mind of the nation.[21] Arnold's further comments on the State as an instrument of power would not have interested Smiles, but *Self-Help* can be seen as Smiles' reflections of the inadequacy of other means of reform.

The new *élite* would naturally rely for their status upon their character and their actions — character being "the noblest possession of man, constituting a rank in itself."[22] To emphasize his point, Smiles used the last and evidently summarising chapter in *Self-Help* to explain his meaning, entitling it "Character — The True Gentleman."

Indeed, *Self-Help* was something of an egalitarian etiquette book. It was a moral guide to the conduct of everyday life — hopefully designed to create that redeeming and hard working *élite* from among all who would listen — but designed to appeal particularly to the new reading public of artisans and mechanics, who had no continuity of class experience to fall back upon, and whose plans for the future lacked suitable models.[23] In this sense *Self-Help* falls into the category of those Victorian etiquette books which were beginning to appear in mid-Century, such as *How to Behave: A Pocket Manual of Etiquette, and Guide to Correct Personal Habits* (Glasgow, 1865). Just as these etiquette books explained the means by which the untutored could identify socially acceptable forms of behaviour, so *Self-Help* explained the way in which work, perseverence and other virtues were the correct forms of behaviour for the natural aristocracy of merit to follow in the new industrial society.[24]

* * *

Having offered a reassessment of Smiles' current reputation as an author of 'success' stories, and a reinterpretation of the concept of 'self-help' in accordance with the five elements of (i) moral and financial independence; (ii) self-culture and self-education; (iii) character formation; (iv) social reform through individual moral reform; and (v) the encouragement of a classless aristocracy of merit, it remains to suggest, in a more speculative manner, a way in which Smiles' concept of 'self-help' did correspond to the so-called Victorian literature of success. 'So-called' because although limitations of space and time prevent the production of much evidence, it seems clear that it was not until the very end of the century that outright Horatio Alger type success stories were written in any quantity. Stories with success titles in the middle years of the 19th Century tended to emphasise, as did Smiles' books, character, self-culture and moral reform. To cite merely three examples:

In *Men who have Risen (1859),* James Hogg declared that "success itself signifies really nothing, . . ." and in 1879 the message of W. H. Davenport Adam's *Secret of Success* was still much the same, not

> wordly prosperity, no extraordinary phase of fortune, but rather the acquisition of a 'sound mind in a sound body,' the complete culture of the physical, moral and intellectual faculties of the individual . . .

Even as late as 1883, Joseph Johnson could not promise success in his *Self-Effort, or the true method of attaining success in life,* although tedious labour might avoid failure, but with the aid of hard work he did promise one type of success to all: "Culture and character. The building up of the man is a work infinitely more important than the accumulation of wealth. . . ."[25]

Why the emphasis on character and self-culture in these so-called 'success' books? Partly because many of these books were written by clergymen, who no doubt feared the secularisation believed to be inherent in an over-zealous commitment to business, and so wrote what were really anti-success books. Partly because many, like Smiles, felt that character and self-culture were indeed the best form of success and that the singleminded pursuit of wealth was not sanctioned by either traditional, moral, or religious principles. And partly because many Victorians, again like Smiles, felt caught between the Scylla of intense money getting, and the Charybdis of the leisured gentlemen — a position which made it difficult to meet the rising expectations of the upward striving artisans and mechanics of the Mutual Improvement Societies and Mechanics Institutes.[26] Samuel Smiles and others at mid-Century therefore attempted to find an ideal of work and success that was a *via media* between an authoritarian status quo, and the seeming danger to social values of a wide open race for success; attempted to find a *via media* between the excessive pursuit of money and status, and the too ready acceptance by the emergent working class of their disorderly, poverty-stricken, and potentially 'dangerous' condition.[27] Somewhat predictably this *via media* emphasised the value of work and character as a good in itself, quite apart from any material success to be derived from the results of such work and character, and incentives to work were presented in a variety of uneasy compromises between authoritarian directives and proposals for personal development and advance.

For example, in his fictionalised story of the education of Benjamin Franklin, written in 1870, Henry Mayhew has the young Franklin ask his uncle rather plaintively:

> Is there not a medium, Josh, between the overweening love of wealth. and the reckless disregard of it; a middle course between a despotic delight in that worldly power . . . of riches, and the servile abandonment of . . . poverty?

The medium was hard to find, but it could be achieved through moral self-control, stated Franklin's uncle. That was one answer, but another came from Maria Edgeworth, who in her *Parent's Assistant,* 1854 edition, conceded that "the education of different ranks should, in some respects, be different. . . . [T]heir ambition is to be directed to different objects." This was difficult in the story of 'Lazy Lawrence,' where Miss Edgeworth's "object was to excite a spirit of industry. . . ." She remarked that in her story care was

> taken to proportion the reward to the exertion, and to point out that people feel cheerful and happy whilst they are employed. The reward of our industrious boy, though it be money, is only money considered as the means of gratifying a benevolent wish. In a commercial nation, it is especially necessary to separate, as much as possible, the spirit of industry and avarice, and to beware lest we introduce vice under the form of virtue.[28]

How, therefore, to stimulate industry for its own sake, without also stimulating a harmful desire for money? A difficult task!

Other attempts to find a *via media* concentrated on allowing limited social mobility. In his book on self-culture in 1861, the Methodist, William Unsworth, thought that thousands of poor men might not become statesmen or field marshals, but that they might become masters, managers, foremen, "or at the very least, sensible and intelligent workmen." And the hero of an anonymous 1860 novel entitled *Henry Birkett, the story of a man who helped himself,* announced his limited hopes: "I may not be great, I may not be rich, I care not to be either; but I feel determined to get a few steps up the ladder and am longing to climb." Another novel, Mrs. Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), presented the ideal of the self-made man with a fairly common restraining twist — the hero, unknown to all, had been born a gentleman and so his elevation posed no threat to the established order. Perhaps the clearest sign of uneasiness occurred in an anonymous 1870 novel, *Too Much and Too Little Money,* in which one spokesman complained of "the horror of this rapid money making" and even felt it "worse to have too much money than too little." But in the end the ideal was to find a *via media* between "the equally balanced evils of TOO MUCH AND TOO LITTLE MONEY."

There were many attempts, therefore, to find a middle way for those eager to improve themselves — a middle way which would not encourage too much social mobility nor too much devotion to business — and at least the Rev. Blaikie was confident that a *via media* was there to be found. In his book, *Better Days for Working People* (1863), he stated that "difficult though it be to find the middle channel between Scylla and Charybdis, between waste and worldliness, it does exist and may be found."[29]

In conclusion, therefore, it might be suggested that mid-Victorian 'success' literature to a very considerable extent stressed work and character formation and a series of carefully regulated goals rather than the total pursuit of success, and that it is best understood as a literature which aimed at controlling the behaviour and expectations of the self-educated readers among the newly emergent working classes.[30] Complementary, then, to the interpretation of the concept of self-help already given, it is also suggested that Smiles' message of self-culture, character formation, and moral and financial independence, may be seen as part of a concern for social behaviour and values in a changing and rapidly industrialising country — a concern that is reflected as much in Samuel Smiles' concept of self-help as in the pages of the ambivalent Victorian 'success' books.[31]

NOTES

1 There are two essays on Smiles, Asa Briggs' chapter on Smiles in his *Victorian People* (Chicago, 1955) and K. Fielden, "Samuel Smiles and Self-Help," *Victorian Studies,* December, 1968, vol. XII. There is also a monograph on Smiles by his granddaughter, Aileen Smiles, *Samuel Smiles and his Surroundings* (London, 1956). Briggs also wrote an introduction to the centenary edition of *Self-Help* (London, 1958), and Royden Harrison an Afterword to the 1968 Sphere Books edition of *Self-Help*. Of these, Fielden comes closest to my interpretation, being a great deal more cautious in regarding *Self-Help* as success literature, and stating correctly that duty, character and knowledge were important to Smiles. However, Fielden is mistaken, I believe, in his analysis when he remarks that Smiles was Janus faced (requiring character, duty, and knowledge to supplement business success) for as the paper points out, Smiles was not interested in success at all, but in the moral reform of character and the achievement of "independence." Fielden's view seems to arise from his belief that Smiles changed from addressing literate workers in the 1840's to addressing culture-lacking middle class achievers. This theory is difficult to accept because *Character* (1871), *Thrift* (1875), and *Duty* (1880) (and to a lesser extent *Life and Labour* (1887)) were only too obviously aimed at the working classes — the middle classes were part of Smiles' solution, not part of the problem. J. F. C. Harrison investigates Victorian success literature in his *Learning and Living* (London, 1961), Chapter V.

2 These passages are perforce taken out of context, but I believe their general meaning to be as I have indicated.

[3] Smiles, "Money versus Worth," *Leeds Times,* Oct. 15, 1842, p. 6.

[4] Smiles, "The Tory Government on Popular Education," *ibid,* July 23, 1842, p. 4; Smiles, "The Oppressed Poor," *ibid,* March 12, 1842, p. 4; Smiles, "Our Social Distractions," *ibid,* Nov. 2, 1839, p. 4. "Riches are no proof whatever of moral worth, . . ." Smiles wrote in *Self-Help; with illustrations of character and conduct* (Author's edition; Boston, 1859), p 287.

[5] Smiles, *The Education of the Working Classes* (Leeds, 1844), p. 8. This can be seen in the *Leeds Times,* March 30, 1839, p. 4; and in Smiles, *The Education of the Working Classes,* pp. 7-8. As noted, Smiles showed himself sympathetic to the idea of the elevation of the *condition* of the entire working class, which was after all only common sense. But Smiles, like the Philosophical Radicals, often thought of society as having one major social category — the "People" — which comprised all of society, apart from the relatively small aristocracy. Thus if the rest of society had advanced, but not the working classes, then by a process of "levelling-up," the *condition* of the working classes should be brought in line with the rest of the "People." The question of individual advance was academic in comparison to the real need of "levelling-up." Thus, "it is not governments, then, but THE PEOPLE who must educate the people, . . ." Smiles, *ibid,* p. 5. For the concept of "the People" among Radicals, see Joseph Hamburger, *Intellectuals in Politics: John Stuart Mill and the Philosophical Radicals* (New Haven and London, 1965), p. 33. Another example of Smiles' use of "People" comes in Dr. Smiles, "Government and the People — the Public Health," *Eliza Cook's Journal* (vols. 1-12, 1849-1854), March 6, 1852, vol. VI, p. 289.

[6] Rev. T. Milner, *The Elevation of the People, Moral, Instructional and Social* (London, 1846), p. 212.

[7] Smiles, *Self-Help,* p. 315.

[8] Smiles, *Autobiography,* ed. T. Mackay (London, 1905), pp. 34, 52. From the point of view of Fletcher's influence on Smiles, it is worth noting that the man who was Fletcher's intimate friend, and who edited and published Fletcher's lectures was none other than the doctor to whom Smiles was apprenticed for three years in Haddington before going to Medical School in Edinburgh — Dr. Robert Lewins. Smiles considered Fletcher "a most profound lecturer," and thought that the posthumously published lectures showed "the calibre and genius of the man," *ibid,* p. 35.

[9] Fletcher, *Rudiments of Physiology,* ed. Robert Lewins (Edinburgh and London, 1835), Part I: "On Organism," passim, and Part III, p. 89.

[10] Smiles, *Autobiography,* pp. 8, 13, 24, 27; and Smiles to William [son], June 25, 1868 (Smiles collection, Archives, Leeds Public Library) (hereinafter *Smiles Correspondence)* SS/A/II 5a and b.

[11] Smiles, *Self-Help,* pp. 312, 206, 274.

[12] *Ibid,* p. 317. Hence, when Smiles was actually faced with a group of men who were evidently trying to reach middle class status (members of the Leeds Mutual Instruction Society), he reacted in a curiously neutral manner, acknowledging their purpose in his speech to them, but adding "It was, however, the elevation and the enlightenment of the great mass of the people that was the most desirable object, . . . " Smiles, speech at the "Anniversary of the Leeds Mutual Instruction Society," *Leed Times,* Feb. 28, 1846, p. 3.

[13] This kind of advice was of course very common at the time, and the whole concept of "independence" has been well developed by W. L. Burn in his *Age of Equipoise* and more recently by Geoffrey Best in his *Mid Victorian Britain* (1971), pp. 256 ff.

[14] Smiles, "The greatest thing in a city," *Leeds Times,* Feb. 5, 1842, p. 6; Smiles, "The Present Age," *ibid,* Aug. 7, 1841, p. 6. Both articles refer to Channing.

[15] [Smiles], "Success in Life," *Eliza Cook's Journal,* May 7, 1853, vol. IX, p. 30. For identification of this and other articles in *Eliza Cook's Journal,* see T. H. E. Travers, "Samuel Smiles and the Victorian Work Ethic," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1970) Smiles, *Self-Help,* p. 289.

[16] Smiles, to William Buckles, Dec. 28, 1857 (British Transport Historical Records, London), MS f. W2/109.

[17] R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (Mentor edition; New York, 1947), p. 191. Tawney's attempt to link Puritanism and Capitalism has been justly criticised, but his analysis of Calvinistic ideals are often perceptive. I do not deny either that Calvinism was not the only system to emphasise such virtues.

[18] J. W. Alexander, *The Young Man in Business Cheered and Counselled* (London, 1861), p. 70; J. W. Gilbart, *The Moral and Religious Duties of Public Companies* (London, 1856), p. 18. cf. also, Rev. Tweedie, *Man and his Money: Its use and abuse* (London, 1855), p. 148.

[19] Smiles, *Thrift* (New York, 1876), pp. 51, 52.

[20] Smiles, *Autobiography*, p. 226; Anon to Smiles, n.d., *Smiles Correspondence*, typewritten copy between SS/AIX/192 and 193; Robert Verkins (?) to Smiles, March 4, 1880, *ibid*, SS/AIX/182; Joseph Watson to Smiles, Jan. 26, 1872, *ibid*, SS/AIX/184.

[21] For comments on Matthew Arnold's "remnant" see Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (Harper Torchbook edition; New York, 1966), pp. 121 ff. To a lesser extent Coleridge's "clerisy" were to play the same kind of role.

[22] Smiles, *Self-Help*, p. 376.

[23] Cf. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: An Economic History of Britain since 1750* (London, 1968), p. 68.

[24] Smiles idealised this natural aristocracy and their virtues in many books and letters; for example, Smiles, *George Moor, Merchant and Philanthropist* (2nd edition; London and New York, 1878), p. 517. Smiles to J. N. Dick, n.d., *Smiles Correspondence*, SS/AIV/1. Smiles, *Robert Dick, Baker of Thurso, Geologist and Botanist* (New York, 1879), pp. (vii) and 432. Smiles, *Life of a Scottish Naturalist, Thomas Edward, Associate of the Linnaean Society* (New York, 1877), pp. 13, 325. Smiles once conceded that he did idealise Edward a bit, Smiles to Janet Hartree [daughter], January 4, 1878, *Smiles Correspondence*, SS/AI/81.

[25] James Hogg, *Men who have Risen: A Book for Boys* (London and Edinburgh, 1859), p. 222. W. H. Davenport Adams, *The Secret of Success; or, How to get on in the World* (London, 1879), p. (xiii). Joseph Johnson, *Self-Effort, or the true method of attaining success in life* (London, 1883), p. 21.

[26] For the aristocracy of labour, see E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (Anchor Books edition; New York, 1967), pp. 321-370. Perhaps this category of 'upward striving' should include what one etiquette book described as "that immense substratum of lower middle-class which interposes between the middle and working classes, . . ." Countess of . . ., *Good Society* (London and New York, 1869), pp. (vii)-(viii). Mutual Improvement Societies have not been studied, but in Manchester one such society moved from an exclusively Church-oriented group in 1843, studying such subjects as "Proofs for the existence of God," to a more commercially minded approach in 1858: "How far will a Christian course of conduct in young men conduce to their secular interests in commercial towns" and in 1861, to prepare the youth "for life, real active life," *The Bennet Street Mutual Improvement Class* (3 vols.; MS M. 38, Manchester Public Library), 1/1, 1/2, 1/3; vols. 1 and 3.

[27] For example, the Rev. W. Tuckniss' description of the "Non-Workers" as the "Dangerous Classes" in Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor; a Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those that will Work, Those that cannot Work, and Those that will not Work* (4 vols; London, 1861), vol. IV, p. (v).

[28] Henry Mayhew, *Young Benjamin Franklin* (London, 1870), pp. 142-143, 137. Maria Edgeworth, Preface to *The Parent's Assistant; or Stories for Children* (London, 1854), pp. (viii), (ix). (This Preface remained the same in the editions of 1864, 1885 and 1897.)

[29] William Unsworth, *Self-Culture and Self-Reliance: or, the Poor Man's Help to Elevation on Earth and in Heaven* (London and Alford, 1861), p. 37. *Henry Birkett; The story of a man who helped himself* (London, 1860), p. 175.

Mrs. Craik, *John Halifax, Gentleman* (3 vols; London, 1856), vol. III, p. 31; vol. II, pp. 145, 205. *Too Much and Too Little Money* (2 vols; London, 1870), vol. I, p. 60; vol. II, p. 235. Rev. W. Blaikie, *Better Days for Working People* (London, 1863), p. 108. Another example of the *via media* of self-help, offering encouragement but not outright independent action, is found in an S.P.C.K. story in which two young people recall valuable advice they had been given by their elders: "They told us to be industrious, and to help ourselves, and God would help us . . . to help ourselves, but *not to trust in ourselves, . . .*" *The Village Beech Tree; or, Work and Trust* (Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge; London, 1872), p. 33 (emphasis mine).

30 At this point it might be useful to compare the 19th Century to another Century, where there also existed a literature emphasising work and character, the 17th Century. In a book entitled *The Revolution of the Saints* (London, 1966), Michael Walzer maintains that the Puritan demand for methodical and continuous activity was "a reaction to the breakdown of country stability, and . . . to the sudden appearance of the mobile urban man." The Puritan work ethic was "at least as much a response to the overriding problem of social order as it is to the individual's anxiety with regard to his fate in the life to come." In the same way, the 19th Century work ethic can also be seen as a response to the disruption of social order, from Peterloo (1819) onwards, and a response to the emergence of the volatile and (to other classes) often fearsome working classes.

31 An argument similar to mine, although concentrating on the early Victorian interest in education of the poor as a means of controlling working class behaviour, is Richard Johnson's "Educational Policy and Social Control in Early Victorian England" *Past and Present*, No. 49, November 1970, pp. 96-119.