

Samuel Smiles

SELF-IMPROVEMENT

TO DO JUSTICE, a man must think well not only of himself, but of the duties which he owes to others! He must not aim too low, but regard man as created "a little lower than the angels." Let him think of his high destiny—of the eternal interests in which he has a part—of the great scheme of nature and providence—of the intellect with which he has been endowed—of the power of loving conferred upon him—of the home on earth provided for him; and he will cease to think meanly of himself. The poorest human being is the centre of two eternities, the Creator overshadowing all.

Hence, let every man respect himself—his body, his mind, his character. Self-respect, originating in self-

love, instigates the first step of improvement. It stimulates a man to rise, to look upward, to develop his intelligence, to improve his condition. Self-respect is the root of most of the virtues—of cleanliness, chastity, reverence, honesty, sobriety. To think meanly of one's self is to sink—sometimes to descend a precipice at the bottom of which is infamy.

Every man can help himself to some extent. We are not mere straws thrown upon the current to mark its course; but possessed of freedom of action, endowed with power to stem the waves and rise above them, each marking out a course for himself. We can each elevate ourselves in the scale of moral being. We can cherish pure thoughts. We can perform good

actions. We can live soberly and frugally. We can provide against the evil day. We can read good books, listen to wise teachers, and place ourselves under the divinest influences on earth. We can live for the highest purposes, and with the highest aims in view.

"Self-love and social are the same," says one of our poets. The man who improves himself, improves the world. . . . Society at large is but the reflex of individual conditions. . . .

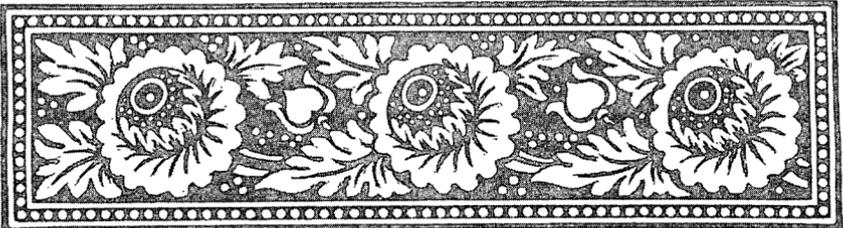
Then again, a man, when he has improved himself, is better able to improve those who are brought into contact with him. He has more power. His sphere of vision is enlarged. He sees more clearly the defects in the condition of others that might be remedied. He can lend a more active helping hand to raise them. He has done his duty by himself, and can with more authority urge upon others the necessity of doing the like duty to themselves. How can a man be a social elevator, who is himself walking in the mire of self-indulgence? How can he teach sobriety or cleanliness, if he be himself drunken or foul? "Physician,

Samuel Smiles (1812–1904) was born in Haddington, Scotland. He was trained as a medical doctor but gave up practice early in his career to become a journalist. He served as a railroad executive for several years before returning to writing. What fascinated him most were the possibilities of achievement for those who would study, work, save, invest, and innovate. Among his books are *Self-Help* (1859), *Character* (1871), *Thrift* (1875), and *Duty* (1880).

heal thyself," is the answer of his neighbors.

The sum and substance of our remarks is this: In all the individual reforms or improvements that we desire, we must begin with ourselves. We must exhibit our gospel in our own life. We must teach by our own example. If we would have others elevated, we must elevate ourselves. Each man can exhibit the results in his own person. He can begin with self-respect. ☉

From the book, *Thrift*, by Samuel Smiles (Chicago: Belfords, Clarke & Co., 1879), pp. 31–32.



THE MYTH OF THE STABLE PRICE LEVEL

INFLATION has become a way of life for most Americans, changing the values they place on saving for the future as opposed to consuming luxury goods today. When all prices are seen as rising, why should you try to save up the cash for some purchase when you might buy it now on credit, and pay just a little bit more over the next several years. In financial circles, the emphasis is no longer on asset management but liability management. Inflation benefits the risk-taking speculator, not the conservative or prudent who dislike financial risks. The average citizen feels the pain, and public opinion polls reflect a demand for a stable price level.

Almost every economist would agree that a stable price level would

be a desirable social objective. Some economists would argue that a little bit of inflation is a healthful tonic for a stagnant economy, but rare indeed is the economist who wants to see a declining price level. It is as if any general trend for prices to fall might cause some kind of economic disaster. A Great Crash in the stock market, perhaps, would recur.

The economists, however, who put their faith in a stable price level are not really practicing economics at all. They are indulging in politics. Certainly the line between economic policy analysis and political practice is a narrow one, but the difference is clear. An economist might look closely at the indirect economic effects of a government policy and make a professional judgment about the effects of the policy; but when he evaluates them as "good" or "bad"

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