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Abstract
While Victorian responses to the machine varied greatly, a distinct literary strain emerged with Carlyle and ran through Ruskin and Dickens which understood the machine as a threat to human agency. In their fear, they focused on machinery itself as sublime or horrible. Samuel Smiles's series of engineering biographies, entitled Lives of the Engineers, argues against this position by highlighting the engineer, the human element, who creates and controls the machine. Interacting with concepts from Carlyle, Smiles's biographies show engineers as Captains of Industry, dynamic men who shape themselves and lead others. By combining a narrative of these self-made men with a narrative of technological history, Smiles shows that machines are products of human agency rather than threats to it. This presentation facilitates the inclusion of engineers in subsequent works by Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, George Eliot, and Rudyard Kipling.

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Samuel Smiles (23 December 1812 – 16 April 1904) was a Scottish author and reformer. England was nothing, compared to continental nations until she had become commercial...until about the middle of the last century, when a number of ingenious and inventive men, without apparent relation to each other, arose in various parts of the kingdom, succeeded in giving an immense impulse to all the branches of the national industry; the result of which has been a harvest of wealth and prosperity, perhaps without