This project began accidentally. A copy of Samuel Smiles’s *Character* appeared in the hefty pile of Interlibrary Loan books I received one morning while working on my first book, *Avuncularism*, at my first job at Simmons College in Boston. I returned it after a quick read when I found it had nothing to do with uncles, but I was so haunted by Smiles’s mysterious meanderings about Edwin Chadwick, John Ruskin and the filthiness of Venice that I kept a copy of *Character* on my desk for most of my time at Simmons and later at Southwestern University. For this reason, I first want to thank all of the fabulous librarians I have worked with over the years who sometimes know better than I do what book or which essay I should read, and who labor with limited resources to make sure I can have those materials in my possession for possibly unreasonable stretches of time. Some of these wonderful professionals are Lisa Anderson, Dana Hendrix, Carol Fonken, Lisa Hopkins and Laura Forbes Glass.

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