

Annemarie McAllister, *Writing for Social Change in Temperance Periodicals: Conviction and Career*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2023. 178 pp. ISBN 9781032069937

Dr Annemarie McAllister is a former Senior Research Fellow in History at the University of Central Lancashire. A periodicals scholar and expert in the history of the temperance movement, McAllister explores how the publications sponsored by temperance organizations spread the word about “demon drink” and built communities of readers from cradle to grave, but also how these publications created opportunities for thousands of contributors, many from working-class backgrounds, to create and participate in literary culture.

In *Writing for Social Change*, McAllister selects from the myriad writers who contributed to temperance periodicals between the 1840s and 1930s and presents detailed studies of seven, all of whom embodied both “conviction” – dedication to the cause –and “career.” As McAllister notes, each was “representative in various ways,” with works that included “prose fiction, poetry, non-fiction, songs, training and advice, and popular scientific instruction” (12). Three – Clara Lucas Balfour, William Hoyle, and Mary Magdalen Forrester – wrote for and edited temperance periodicals; two – Balfour and Mary Anna Paull – were popular novelists; and one –Hoyle – was a notable composer, whose songbooks were instrumental in the Band of Hope’s music programming and choirs. Others – Walter N. Edwards and Alfred J. Glasspool – parlayed their (unpaid) temperance writing into successful livings as authors. Despite differences in eras, ages, genders, locations, and particular pursuits within the movement, all seven regarded “their writing and work for temperance as the central mission of their lives” (13). Together, their stories illuminate how writing for a cause could be a powerful driver for personal and social development.

This is an immensely rich book that illuminates many underappreciated aspects of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British history. It is filled with details about the rewards – mostly spiritual, sometimes monetary – of throwing one’s life into a cause. These details are drawn from McAllister’s encyclopaedic knowledge of temperance periodicals, related novels, tracts, songbooks, and textbooks – knowledge painstakingly accumulated through years of scouring libraries and archives for missing numbers from the multi-decade runs of not-yet-digitized temperance publications. A couple of her subjects wrote autobiographical sketches or memoirs, but much of the information here had to be gleaned from close readings of chapter minutes, sleuthing in public record offices, and meticulous differentiation between writers with similar names. The result is a very readable, well-rounded account of the lives of a handful of individuals who – for the most part – would not have thought of themselves as remarkable, but who nevertheless managed to make a mark on the world. Their stories hint at the wealth of information about Victorian culture that is still lying fallow.

Space precludes synopses of all of McAllister’s chapters, but hopefully a few details from the lives of two of her subjects will suggest how *Writing for Social Change* contributes to social history. McAllister’s first subject is Clara Lucas Balfour, who was associated with several temperance periodicals, including the *London Tee-total Magazine and Literary Miscellany*, its successor *The Weekly Journal of the New British and Foreign Temperance Society*, and the *Band*

of *Hope Review* and *Onward*. Balfour and her husband James –whose drinking had made the early years of their marriage miserable – joined the temperance movement in 1837. After taking the pledge, James became a committed temperance lecturer, and Clara lectured, wrote, and edited for the cause. She was prolific, working in multiple genres from poetry and fiction to history and literary commentary, and her texts ran the gamut from short poems and tracts to full-length volumes. Although temperance was her most important topic, she also wrote about other issues, from animal cruelty to biblical criticism. Her industry seems incredible, but one of McAllister’s valuable contributions to our understanding of the Victorian literary economy is her analysis of how Clara reused and repackaged her work for different kinds of publication – a process that, as McAllister suggests, would certainly merit a separate full-length study.

McAllister also reveals a great deal about how the Victorian temperance movement relied upon powerful and richly interwoven networks. Her profile of Frank Adkins illuminates both the range of work and the sheer physical distances that indefatigable temperance advocates covered. Adkins worked as an “agent” for the Band of Hope, a job that in 1878–79 involved “recruiting workers and revivifying meetings, motivating tired or bored workers, and encouraging the use of new methods as well as . . . rousing enthusiasm in the hearers of his [magic] lantern lectures” – all this in an area that stretched from Wales to Norwich, South Essex to Birmingham (83). As he crisscrossed the British Isles lugging heavy projection equipment, he somehow found time to write contributions for the temperance press and lyrics for recruitment songs, and he later built a following as the author of columns by “Uncle Frank” in the *Band of Hope Chronicle* and the *Band of Hope Review*. When he nominally retired in 1925, his half-century of constant campaigning on behalf of temperance led him to be dubbed the “‘Grand Old Man’ of the movement”—although McAllister reports that even in retirement he still went to the office every day (97).

McAllister comments that she had long been impressed by the “energy and achievements” of many of the temperance writers, but that working on this study of individuals within the movement gave her an even deeper appreciation for their generous involvement with the cause and eagerness to write for the betterment of one another. That the temperance movement coevolved with the Victorian publishing industry meant that “periodicals were the powerhouses which sustained” the movement (163). It also meant that writers who found a base of support in the movement could use that base as a springboard for other ventures. While temperance may not be every scholar’s cup of tea, McAllister’s work reminds us that a more expansive sense of what history and literature encompasses can open multiple doors for scholarship. As she reminds us, “There are many more such [individuals] in areas of social concern whose stories and work should be restored to the historical record” (164).

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