

Family and Education: a temperance perspective

Joanne Madin Vieira Paisana
(Universidade do Minho)

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This paper intends to explore the nineteenth-century temperance movement's attempts to improve family life and to spread the benefits of education through the working of junior temperance organisations – Bands of Hope – which were specifically set up for such a purpose.

The Rechabite Handbook and Temperance Compendium ([1850]303) states the temperance movement as having as its aim, 'the preservation of the frail and the reduction of human misery'. How did the movement intend to achieve this all-embracing objective? Working from the premise that the abuse of alcohol was one of the main reasons for the abject wretchedness in which thousands of people lived in nineteenth-century Britain, temperance reformers from the 1830s onwards tirelessly worked to preserve the frail and reduce human misery by reducing drunkenness among the adult population. Part of the general self-help philosophy which was gaining support at the time was their particular message of self-help – the regulation of alcoholic consumption to either moderate or zero levels, depending on which school of thought the temperance reformer belonged to, moderationist or teetotal. The temperance movement was, therefore, a cog in a larger wheel.

Temperance zeal spread out from the towns, particularly northern ones, as part of a general attack on ignorance and rusticity which included support for a variety of 'improving' causes and technological developments, of which all humanitarian movements which undermined brutal forms of recreation, shorter factory working hours, education and the railway, are just a few examples. Josephine Butler welcomed the temperance leaders' support for the promotion of the Contagious Diseases Act, saying that

they were the men with the most weight and zeal in the towns, who have a 'considerable acquaintance with life' and gather around them all the decent men, getting them to follow any movement they start.

Temperance work among children began in the 1830s in the juvenile divisions of the many differently-sponsored adult temperance organisations. By the 1850s there is evidence that temperance work was becoming ever more child-centred, indicating a certain discouragement concerning the 'war' against adult drunkenness. This tendency worried the founding-father of the temperance movement, Joseph Livesey, who declared on many occasions that retreating from the world of grown drinkers in order to teach boys and girls was an admission of weakness and a symptom of despair.

The first use of the name 'Band of Hope' is attributed to the philanthropist Anne Jane Carlile who used it in 1847 whilst speaking to Leeds Sunday School children. Although the term became a generic one for any youth group, regardless of sponsorship, (the Church of England, the Wesleyans, the Society of Friends and other secular societies had their own Bands of Hope), it was used in the temperance movement for a specific organisation concerned with temperance work among children of both sexes from the age of six. Children of both drinking and non-drinking families could be members. The temperance Band of Hope movement was non-denominational, despite its close ties with many churches. By March 1849 the Leeds Band of Hope had pledged more than 4,000 young people between the ages of six and sixteen. By 1851 the movement was strong enough to allow the establishment of the first Band of Hope Union of societies in Bradford, something which was quickly copied all over the country. By supplying travelling, professional temperance lecturers the unions were instrumental in introducing new ideas and broader visions into the narrower environment of many neighbourhood groups. By 1889 there were at least 16,000 Bands of Hope in Britain and according to Norman Longmate 'by 1897 there were 3,200,000 Band of Hope members' (1968: 124). Although many children lapsed from their pledge on reaching maturity, most were indelibly marked by their passage through these juvenile temperance societies. The striking build-up of anti-drink sentiment during the last quarter of the nineteenth century can

be explained by the massive mid-century anti-drink campaigns, in which the Bands of Hope played their part.

Many Band of Hope members were from stable, upper-working-class families with steady, if not vulnerable jobs, who were encouraged to aspire to a middle-class style of life. Children from the poorest slums were less well represented, however, for delayed gratification had little meaning for them and parents could not afford the pennies for the thrift banks or the penny-a-month subscription. Public speaking also had little appeal for the destitute, for most of these children had no schooling at all, or personal discipline, (they were required to come to meetings on time, be alert and clean, which was difficult for children who had often worked a full day beforehand). Therefore, the children of the most vulnerable families – the poorest – were often unintentionally 'excluded' from the movement.

Anyone could start up a Band of Hope. In the early years there were no established or standard programmes to follow and few suitable places for meetings. *The Band of Hope Review*, in an early issue, suggests inviting the children to the schoolroom or one's own dwelling house. Many of the first Bands of Hope were set up in Sunday schools or on chapel premises. The common format was eventually established as containing a prayer, a hymn, a temperance lesson or talk by an adult, a children's song and recital, and a final prayer and hymn. A typical hymn is the following, taken from *The New Temperance Hymnal*, 1909

Oh we're a youthful Band of Hope,
All pledged strong drink to flee
Then let our watchword sound afar:
"No drink, no drink for me!"

Warnings were given, especially towards the end of the century, however, about the danger of boring children with repetitious, sanctimonious stories and hymns. One of the lecturers in the Band of Hope Speakers' Preparation Class complained: 'I am weary of the repetition of worn-out recitations. I should be glad to take part in the funeral of "Little Jim", and wish that something could move the boy who stood on the burning deck.

The Band of Hope Hymn-Book contains 156 hymns, yet I believe I have heard the hymns beginning “Rescue the perishing”... and “Yield not to temptation” three times every week for thirteen years’, (Collins, 1983: 57). On the other hand, thousands of lantern lectures, many with evocative titles like ‘Beware of the Trap’, ‘I Only Take a Little Wine’ and ‘What Have You Done Today?’ were delivered every year. The slides were often based on the well-known caricaturist George Cruikshank’s *The Bottle*. (Cruikshank was one of the members of the first committee of the United Kingdom Band of Hope Union which was formed in May 1855). Meetings were usually held once a week, for an hour. The teetotal pledge, a promise to abstain from all intoxicating liquor, played an important part, but could not be administered without the consent of the parents. An anti-tobacco pledge was usually included too. Drink and tobacco were seen as twin evils to be avoided by all respectable children.

One reason for the Band of Hope’s popularity was the variety of novel activities it offered, not to be confused with the serious lecturing, at a time when there was little organised entertainment for children. There were elocution classes, Christmas parties and industrial and art exhibitions (the first of which had a Singer sewing machine, “value 5 guineas” as a prize). Seaside excursions often offered children their first glimpse of the sea, and lending libraries facilitated their quest for literacy. Lessons in making temperance drinks, games in the Band of Hope playground, and day trips were also very popular. The aim was both to instruct and to entertain, as the Annual Reports of the Band of Hope Union clearly show.

Music was highly regarded by Band of Hope organisers – singing hymns at home was intended to melt the drunken father’s heart, forcing him to repent! The influence of the ‘singing saloons’, often the ‘means of ensnaring and leading astray the young and unsuspecting’ (Collins, 1983: 57) had to be countered. Many choirs and brass bands were rehearsed for concerts and competitions, and simple orchestras were organised. For many children this was their first formal introduction to music. Starting in 1862, impressive formal concerts were held in London for the massed choirs of the Band of Hope movement, (in 1886 there were 15,000 singers in three choirs appearing on the same day on the stage of the

Crystal Palace). This massive public showing afforded valuable publicity for the temperance cause and helped to recruit more followers, as did tea parties, fêtes and processions, which often included local dignitaries, in towns and cities all over the country.

How did the Band of Hope, once it had ‘captured’ the children, get its temperance message across to them? Central to Band of Hope teaching was the teetotal catechism, which imitated the Christian one. Fifty-two questions, one for each week of the year, were memorised along with the ritual answers. One example is the following: “Does God make the alcohol in wine? In many ways He does, just as He causes meat to become putrid and pears rotten; but we need not [...] eat the meat or drink the fermented grape juice” (Longmate, 1968: 126). At the weekly meeting the leader would enthusiastically expand on the answers. This somewhat dogmatic approach did not encourage creative thinking on the children’s part. It was not intended to. Drink was simply the devil, to be shunned at all costs.

Many writers composed mnemonic verses, and the anti-drink message was reinforced by grisly pictures, for example comparing the vital organs of moderate or non-drinkers with those of heavy drinkers. Anti-drink alphabets also had a vogue. *The Musical Temperance Alphabet* consisted of simple sentences, each with its own tune. When the teacher held up the letter ‘E’ the class chirped ‘Everybody should always be sober’, ‘O’ produced ‘Old and young are better without beer’, and ‘Q’, ‘Q’ is always followed by U and drink by drunkenness’, and so on (Longmate, 1968: 127).

Temperance picture books entertained and instructed the very young. The following is a commentary which contrasts the sober man’s weekend with the drunkard’s.

Sing a song of Saturday
Wages taken home
Ev’ry penny well laid out,
None allowed to roam! ...

Sing a song of Sunday,
A home that’s black and bare

Wife and children starving,
A crust of bread their share! ...

Sing a song of Monday
Brought before the 'beak'.
Fine of twenty shillings,
Alternative 'a week'!

Workhouse for the children,
Workhouse for the wife!
Isn't that a hideous blot
On our English life?

Many Band of Hope Unions published books and journals, some with a nation-wide circulation. Most had a strong moralistic tone, and all reflected a middle-class view of society. The self-help principle was often stressed in these journals. For example, variations on the theme 'It is better to work than to beg' appeared often. Many journals supported other causes, for example anti-slavery, and were very patriotic. Biographies of self-made men played an important part in the training of Band of Hope children, for by trying to emulate these figures the children were taught that self-control, thrift, hard-work, cleanliness and punctuality bring material rewards which lead to spiritual success.

The attempted inculcation of these qualities was common to both the Band of Hope and the Sunday School movement. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find that the two worked closely together. Many workers were involved in both, serving the same children. Sunday School teachers were often Band of Hope organisers, working towards a reformation of manners as well as an improvement in spiritual and academic educational standards. This is not to say that the Sunday School movement was exclusively temperance in character. In 1842 the Executive Committee of the British Association for the promotion of Temperance, in *An address of the teachers and friends of Sabbath schools on the subject of temperance*, exhorted teachers to 'abolish the practice of giving intoxicating drinks to

Sabbath scholars, on festive occasions' (p. 1) which has led to 'scenes of a most painful character' and is 'utterly indefensible' (p. 3).

Access to the increasing number of elementary schools was a high priority for the temperance movement, including the Band of Hope organisers. Headmasters were generally quite willing to let temperance lecturers into their classrooms. In 1887 a Band of Hope appeal to expand its lecture work in elementary schools raised twelve thousand pounds. This paid for five lecturers who, over five years, were heard by 1,400,000 pupils and 50,000 teachers. The most effective propaganda masqueraded as teaching on biology. Many Board schools adopted textbooks, for example, which included experiments showing that alcohol was harmful to frog-spawn and prevented yeast growing in a test tube.

The Band of Hope knew that converting children alone was not enough, the whole family unit had to renounce drink in order for a transformation in society to occur. This conviction is shown in many ways, but a graphic illustration of its strength of will and mobilising power is shown in the following example: on one Saturday in October 1891, 32,500 Band of Hope visitors each called on thirty or forty homes throughout England, contacting altogether a million families and collecting 100,000 new pledges. Certainly, many pledges were not kept, but others most surely were. The role of both the family unit and the home in combating the problem of drunkenness was well-appreciated by the Band of Hope activists.

To this end the home was promoted as a recreational centre. Both through oral and written examples the drunkard's squalid home was constantly contrasted with the genteel home of the sober. They strove to keep the husband by the domestic fireside, spending his free time with wife and children instead of in the public house with drinking companions. By exhortation and even practical help they sought to instruct wives in domestic science, in the hope of tempting husbands to stay at home. They popularised the cult of the 'private life' and sought to promote the idea of the family as the place for recreation, and much more. Like charity, temperance was best begun at home for then it had more chance of a lasting success.

Yet even erstwhile teetotalers could not work miracles! A pleasant home within the confines of a slum was a very difficult thing to achieve.

The prosperity of the public-house and the squalor of the private house were indeed connected. 'I saw the misery that intemperate habits had caused in many homes', wrote a teetotal working man of his experiences in the 1830s, 'and that decided me as to the course I should adopt. I joined the movement' (Harrison, 1994: 311).

It was the earnest efforts of men like this, convinced they had the key to unlocking the door into a better world for so many people, that sustained the temperance movement and its Bands of Hope throughout the latter nineteenth century. Strategies changed, but the conviction that alcohol abuse was the root cause of poverty did not. Through the Bands of Hope and other juvenile organisations the temperance movement educated by teaching salvation through self-help. The enormous membership numbers attest to the popularity of these organisations, at the very least. The crime figures for drunkenness began, finally, to decline in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Many factors were responsible for this, not the least government action through legislation. However, the Bands of Hope can, I believe, take credit at least for instructing and entertaining children, for being a complement to state schools, helping to make people aware of the negative effects of drink on the individual and on the family unit. The emphasis on improvement and education was sincere in purpose. They recognised that children are the key to the future.

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