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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John W. Crowley, ed.. *Drunkard's Progress: Narratives of Addiction, Despair and Recovery.* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. ix + 202 pp. $58.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8018-6008-9.

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Published on H-SHEAR (April, 2000)

In his 1845 autobiography, former bookbinder and drunkard John B. Gough related his experiences with alcohol. "For three days I endured more agony than pen could describe. Hideous faces appeared on the walls, and on the ceiling, and on the floors; foul things crept along the bedclothes, and glaring eyes peered into mine. I was at one time surrounded by millions of monstrous spiders, who crawled slowly, slowly over every limb, whilst the beaded drops of perspiration would start to my brow, and my limbs would shiver until the bed rattled again"(pp. 144-45). It was with vivid and emotional descriptions like this, along with his dramatic stage flair, that as a temperance lecturer Gough was able to convince many to sign the pledge of abstinence from alcohol. Gough's description of his attack of delirium tremens was part of his experience speech in which he described his descent into alcoholism, his rescue through the Washingtonian pledge and his recovery to become a temperance lecturer.

According to John W. Crowley, Gough's speeches represent a new genre of reform literature that developed in the 1840s: the temperance narrative. In his book, *Drunkard's Progress: Narratives of Addiction, Despair, and Recovery*, Crowley presents excerpts from eight such temperance narratives, limiting his selections to works that appeared in the 1840s as part of the Washingtonian temperance movement. The title of the collection is a reference to the 1846 Nathaniel Currier lithograph *The Drunkards Progress*. Currier's print details nine stages of the life of a habitual drunkard, or what we would today call an alcoholic, from "a glass with a friend" to "death by suicide" (p.2). The narratives are, for the most part, arranged chronologically from T. S. Arthur's "The Experience Meeting," from *Six Nights with the Washingtonians* (1842) to Andrus V. Green's *The Life and Experience of A. V. Green* (1848). The editor has omitted the best known Washingtonian narrative, Walt Whitman's *Franklin Evans* (1842) which is available elsewhere. The introduction to *Drunkard's Progress* provides an overview of the antebellum temperance movement and the Washingtonians. In addition, before each narrative the editor includes a short background of the author

and the larger work from which the selection is derived.

The use of "first-person alcoholic confessions" as a method to reform drunkards was popularized by the Washingtonian temperance movement. Named in honor of the first president, the Washington Temperance Society was found in 1840 in Baltimore by six former drinkers and was based on a pledge of total abstinence from all alcohol. Soon afterwards , Washington Temperance Societies sprung up in communities across the nation, getting hundreds to take the pledge. Unlike the earlier elite and religious dominated temperance groups, who emphasized prevention and considered drunkards to be irredeemable, the new organization actively sought out inebriates and showed them compassion and sympathy. The central feature of the Washingtonian meeting was the confessional speech. During their meetings the Washingtonians would call forth drinkers from the crowd and have them publicly sign the pledge and then tell their own personal experiences. As Crowley notes, "Instead of cerebral clergymen talking down to the inebriated unwashed, drunkards gave hope and inspiration to each other through the unadorned telling of their own life stories" (p. 7). The entertainment value of these emotional and sometimes humorous speeches, along with the groups emphasis on mutual assistance, appealed to many members of the working class.

The Washingtonian narratives that Crowley has uncovered generally follow a similar format. The narrator describes how they developed an appetite for alcohol, how they sank to the lowest levels of despair, and how they were saved by the temperance pledge. These temperance tales combine the sentimental novel and the autobiography. Two of the narratives are fictional accounts. One, *Confessions of a Female Inebriate* (1842) is supposedly authored "By a lady" but Crowley notes its author is apparently Isaac F. Shepard. Although, the Washingtonian were male dominated, women did organize their own Martha Washington Societies. However, this is the only temperance narrative the editor could find that covers the issue of female drinking.

Very popular in their time, these temperance narratives have for the most part been forgotten. Scholars will find interesting material on antebellum family life, work, and gender. With their often crude and unabashed recollections, these works provide valuable insight into the lives of antebellum alcoholics and allow a glimpse into a darker side of life not normally available. For instance, accounts of domestic violence and suicide appear in the narratives. Although the Washingtonians were a short-lived group -- by 1845 most societies had ceased to exist -- ninety years later a new organization, Alcoholics Anonymous, unknowingly adopted many of their features. Indeed, the editor states that one of the reasons he gathered these stories was that "despite their distance from our time, [they] can still speak volumes to present-day alcoholics" (p.x). This collection will be useful to both students of mid-nineteenth century American history and literature. It could also be used as a primary source for American history classes, although the lengthy excerpt from *An Autobiography of John B. Gough* (which takes up over a third of the collection) could have been shortened. Overall, Crowley has done a fine job in presenting these tales "of Addiction, Despair, and Recovery" to a new generation of readers.

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Citation: Aaron Hoffman. Review of Crowley, John W., ed. *Drunkard's Progress: Narratives of Addiction, Despair and Recovery.* H-SHEAR, H-Net Reviews. April, 2000.

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