

“Give me a draught from the crystal spring:” The Temperance Movement for Children in 19th-Century Britain and America.

Clean drinking water was slow in coming in the nineteenth century, but when it did, it served as both a health benefit and an antidote to the scourge of alcoholic drinks supposedly running rampant in society. As part of the Temperance Movement, people wrote tracts and songs about the virtue of drink, like the very popular “Give me a draught from the crystal spring” (1861). Drinking water, not the traditional alcoholic beverages, was especially important for children; so, too, was their involvement in the temperance movement itself. Bands of Hope for children were founded in England in 1847, followed by their establishment in America; between the two, millions of children became engaged in temperance through these weekly-meeting opportunities to recite and sing. Given that most were working-class children lead by the middle-classes, there are issues of class and age exploitation to explore. But there was real power to be handed to children in reforming the adult society around them, too. Children sang and recited before adults. Bands of Hope choirs toured the country, culminating in one at the Crystal Palace in 1886. Literature emphasized the unique abilities that children brought to reform the parents and adults in their midst. Using archival materials, tract literature, and temperance songs from the movement, I will, in this paper, explore the class ideologies, hegemonic pressures, yet also childhood empowerment to be found in the Bands of Hope transatlantic movements.