Bernie Babcock, a twentieth-century sentimental novelist

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Bernie Babcock, a twentieth-century sentimental novelist

by

Netta F. Pyron

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Signatures have been redacted for privacy

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Bernie Babcock was a tiny woman who never doubted for a minute of her 94 years that she could accomplish anything that she set her mind to. The events of her life seemed to support this belief.

She was born Julia Burnelle Smaed in Unionville, Ohio, April 28, 1868. Her poet-inventor father moved the family to Russellville, Arkansas, when she was still a child. Her mother was a music teacher, who proudly traced her ancestry back to eleventh-century English aristocracy. She received her nickname "Bernie" from her grandfather Burnelle, a Methodist minister in Ohio.

Bernie, the oldest of seven, worked to earn her own way at Little Rock University, but still found time to perform in piano recitals and contribute poems and essays to Little Rock newspapers. After one year of college, she married Will Babcock, an express agent. He died eleven years later, leaving Bernie, at age 29, a penniless widow with five small children. Of course, well-intentioned relatives advised her to parcel out the children, but she refused. She determined to try to make a living for herself and her children by writing. She obtained a job as society editor for the Arkansas Democrat at $12.50 a week, and wrote short stories, plays, poems and novels on the kitchen table after the children were in bed at night. After seven months of constant rejections, at last one
of her short stories was accepted for publication. "Teaching a Country School in Arkansas," based on her teenage experiences as a teacher in Pope County, Arkansas, appeared in New Voice, a weekly prohibition paper published by Funk and Wagnalls of New York and Chicago. Several more of her temperance stories were published over the next two years; then New Voice accepted her temperance novel, The Daughter of a Republican, in 1900. It sold over 100,000 copies within six months, but at 20 cents per copy it probably did not bring much money to the author. In 1909, this story was printed as a serial in True American, another prohibition paper, under the title The Daughter of a Patriot.

Mrs. Babcock worked for the Arkansas Democrat for four years, then went to the New Voice office in Chicago, working under the well-known William P. F. Ferguson, the editor who had bought her first story. She left her children, then aged five through fourteen, with relatives in Ohio. The arrangements were not satisfactory, however, and after a year she returned to Little Rock and did free-lance writing. By this time she was a minor celebrity in Little Rock. She had published six books, all about middle-class people whose lives were thwarted in some way by the saloon or political injustices of the day. The books following The Daughter of a Republican were: The Martyr (1900), a temperance tale; At The Mercy of the State (1901), on the evils of drink again;
Justice to the Woman (1901), about a woman betrayed by a heartless lover; An Uncrowned Queen (1902), the life of Frances E. Willard; and A Political Fool (1902), propaganda against saloons.

From 1906 to 1909, Mrs. Babcock edited the Sketch Book, a quarterly literary magazine featuring Arkansas writers. She began the Little Rock Authors and Composers Society, and was one of the founders of the Arkansas Historical Society and the local branch of the American Pen-Women. With O. C. Ludwig, another writer, she compiled Pictures and Poems of Arkansas in 1908, a collection of poems by Arkansas authors illustrated with photographs of Arkansas scenes. In 1909 she published the Christmas story Santa Claus, the Stork, and the Widow, and gave copies to friends for Christmas gifts. The following year she wrote a humorous rebuttal to On a Slow Train Through Arkansas, entitled The Man Who Lied on Arkansas, over seven thousand copies of which were sold on trains. In 1911 she published With Claw and Fang, another temperance novel.

Mrs. Babcock was an accomplished musician as well as a determined writer. Of her writing she said it was "one part talent and nine parts bull-dog perseverance." She loved flowers, animals, and the out-of-doors. Although she began to lean away from the rigid Calvinistic doctrines of her girlhood Methodist church, she maintained high standards of personal conduct and despised hypocrisy in man and institution. Her
explanation of why she never remarried was, "I thought any man who'd marry a widow with five children didn't have much sense, and I didn't want that kind of a man." She was independent, resourceful and competent; for instance, she obtained the literary material, sold advertising, and arranged for printing the Sketch Book by herself. Mrs. Florence McRaven, who did dramatic readings for Mrs. Babcock in 1915, writes "She was fair and generous with me in our business dealings. . . . She sold the attraction and I filled the engagements." During these years, Mrs. Babcock became interested in spiritualism, mental telepathy, and psychic research. She and Mrs. McRaven experimented with sending mental messages to each other from different rooms. Mrs. Babcock later became a Christian Scientist. In addition to being a prohibitionist, she was an early advocate of equal employment rights and suffrage for women.

From 1912 through 1920, many writers over the United States were attracted to Socialism as the answer to problems of poverty, women's suffrage, and oppression of the working man. Mrs. Babcock apparently was sympathetic to the movement and wrote a series of leaflets on Socialist subjects.

In 1914, Mrs. Babcock published her play Mammy, parts of which she later included in her Civil War novel The Soul of Abe Lincoln (1923). She claimed that the faithful old Negro man had often been made the hero of song and story, but hers was the first in which a black mammy played the leading part.
Mrs. Florence McRaven, a local dramatics teacher, presented the play by reading all the parts herself, appearing over fifty times in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Ohio, Alabama, and Chautauqua, New York. The drama was an unabashedly sentimental protest against war, and Mrs. Babcock later said that President Wilson had ordered performances stopped for political reasons when the United States was preparing to enter World War I.  

During the next few years, Mrs. Babcock studied the life of Lincoln, and her historical romance, Soul of Ann Rutledge, was published in May, 1919. It became a best seller, went into fourteen editions and was translated into several languages, including French. Two years later she published a Biblical romance, The Coming of the King; then she returned to Lincoln for her next four books, The Soul of Abe Lincoln (1923), Booth and the Spirit of Lincoln (1925), Little Abe Lincoln (1926), and Lincoln's Mary and the Babies (1928). Two other biographical novels followed, Light Horse Harry's Boy in 1931 and The Heart of George Washington in 1932. Her last published novel was Little Dixie Devil in 1937.

During the 1920s Mrs. Babcock had become interested in natural history museums and sought contributions to establish one in Little Rock. In 1927 she started a museum on the third floor of City Hall with a collection of stuffed animals given by the Natural History Museum of New York. From 1935 to 1937 she directed the WPA Writers Project for Arkansas. While the
writers were doing their research for the state guide book, they located many additional exhibits for the museum. Many gifts were contributed, but often Mrs. Babcock bought items for the collection with her own money. In 1941 the city of Little Rock gave an arsenal building, the birthplace of Gen. Douglas MacArthur, for use of the museum. In addition, the city provided her a curator's salary and a small fund to renovate the building. Determined that her exhibits should not be improperly displayed, Mrs. Babcock, then in her seventies, scaled ladders to paint murals on the walls. Later she visited Gen. MacArthur and told him about the museum, and he responded with some exhibits.

Mrs. Babcock's activities as a museum director left her little time for writing, but she continued to receive recognition for her achievements. She was the first Arkansas woman to be listed in *Who's Who in America*. In 1951 she was awarded an honorary LL.D. from the University of Arkansas. Probably most satisfying of all, she was the acknowledged leader of the literary circle in Arkansas.

In 1957, Mrs. Babcock, then nearly 90, moved to a new home on Petit Jean Mountain, halfway between Little Rock and her girlhood home, Russellville. She purchased a two-room house and had it hauled up the mountain, where she added two more rooms and a porch. She spent her time enjoying the view, completing her book of poetry *The Marble Woman* (1959), painting pictures and writing music. Mrs. McHaven visited her at
Petit Jean and found her "alert in mind and body and still interested in writing." Mrs. Babcock played old songs for her friend, and they both sang them.

Mrs. Babcock died while working at her desk on June 14, 1962. Her scrapbooks and diaries are in the possession of her daughter, Mrs. Frances Cutting of Little Rock. Mrs. Cutting's niece, Mrs. Albert E. Bakker of Buffalo, New York, is interested in writing herself, and has her grandmother's unpublished manuscripts.

It was primarily as a novelist that Mrs. Babcock received her greatest recognition. She wrote in the sentimental mode, conforming to a tradition that dates back to the beginning of the novel in America.
THE SENTIMENTAL NOVEL IN AMERICA

The first novel written in America by an American, The Power of Sympathy (1789) by William H. Brown, was an example of the compound of sex and sensibility known as the sentimental novel. Actually, in 1789 the novel as a literary form had not existed very long, even in England. Three English writers of the eighteenth century were largely responsible for the development of the modern novel as we know it. They were Daniel Defoe, whose Robinson Crusoe (1719) was the first British novel; Samuel Richardson, whose Pamela, a treatise of letter-writing, appeared in 1740; and Henry Fielding, whose Joseph Andrews (1742) was written as a parody of Pamela. The lack of literary tradition or critical principles for guidance of novelists was lamented by Fielding in the early chapters of his Tom Jones (1749). In addition to being a new form, the novel suffered from being held in low esteem for many years. To overcome this prejudice, Defoe, the father of realism in fiction, insisted that Robinson Crusoe was an "allegory" and Moll Flanders and others were "true histories." Other authors insisted that their stories were "based on fact" and included large amounts of moral exhortation to counteract the fear that their books were evil influences.

Richardson followed his popular Pamela with Clarissa Harlowe and the very proper Sir Charles Grandison. His novels were written in the epistolary style, a story told by means of
letters. His influence on the American writers who came later was great, not only in style, but in the themes of harassment and seduction of women, the handsome but wicked seducer, the grasping parent, and the faithful confidante.

Another English author who influenced the early American novelists was Laurence Sterne, whose *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) was a tribute to "sensibility"—another word for "feeling." His contribution to American fiction was the vogue of "sensibility" which eventually led to the flood of tears found in the sentimental novels of the 1850s and 1860s.

These English novels were made available to the American public through reprints and importations, and by 1844 they had begun creating the appetite for fiction that would soon be fed by native authors. Because of the strong didactic nature of most of the early English novels, they were widely accepted in America, and even Jonathan Edwards' daughter read *Pamela* and *Joseph Andrews*.12

It was no accident that *The Power of Sympathy* was "filled with didactic padding and tearful sentimentality."13 One way an American novelist could gain acceptance was to moralize heavily. Despite its moralizing, however, this lurid tale was actually a sensational history of seduction and scandal, said to be based on true incidents. The influence of Richardson could easily be detected, both in the epistolary form and in the choice of subject matter.
The next year saw publication of *Memoirs of the Blooms-grave Family* (1790) by Enos Hitchcock, which was a blameless and dull series of letters expounding on education and morality.

Mrs. Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1794) followed in the Richardson tradition of the harassed female; the heroine Charlotte is seduced, abandoned, and dies. Mrs. Rowson went on to write *Trials of the Human Heart* (1795), *Reuben and Rachel* (1798), *Sarah; or, The Exemplary Wife* (1803-04), and others of the same vein. Many of these employed the epistolary form. Mrs. Rowson's heroines were "virtuous women adventuresses," not content to live passively, but attacking life with courage. Nevertheless, Mrs. Rowson was careful to maintain an underlying moral tone in her books. By 1800 the prejudice against novels was relaxing somewhat, but it was still safer for novelists to stay within the conventional framework of reward and punishment.

Two sentimental writers of the early nineteenth century were Catharine Sedgwick and Lydia Maria Child. Miss Sedgwick wrote *New England Tale* (1822) first as a Unitarian tract; *Redwood* (1824) was another moral story; other books included *Hope Leslie* (1827), and *The Linwoods* (1835). Lydia Child began her career as a writer of historical romances but later became active as an abolitionist and agitator.

There were men writers of fiction during the 1830s and 1840s of course, but the sentimental tradition was handed down
mostly through the women. The full flowering of the senti-
mentalists came in 1850 and lasted for about 25 years, with
publication of scores of social or domestic novels by a
variety of authors, including Susan Warner, Maria Cummins,
Augusta Jane Evans Wilson, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, Ann
Sophia Stephens, Caroline Lee Hentz, Mrs. H. B. Goodwin, and
Marion Harland. Anti-slavery novels, temperance novels, and
religious novels were also written in the sentimental style.

The most prevalent type during this period, the domestic
sentimental novel, is defined as an extended prose tale com-
posed of commonplace household incidents worked into a trite
plot involving characters who functioned mainly as carriers of
religious or moral sentiment. \(^1^4\) Since these novels were
written mostly for women and usually by them, they were neces-
sarily limited in scope to the woman's world—home—varied
only by visits to friends and occasional parties or trips to
the theatre. The nursery, the school, the sickroom, the
death chamber, and domestic relationships gave the heroines of
these novels their opportunities to display mercy and love.
Men appeared as suitors, husbands, or fathers, but their
characters were thinly developed. Their dominant position
over their womenfolk was unquestioned. Marriage was the goal
of every respectable woman, and the ideal wife was portrayed
as patient, long-suffering, meek and uncomplaining. In these
novels, even the severest treatment was not grounds for
separation or divorce. The earliest domestic novels relied more on religious sentiment than romantic love, but as the genre developed the proportion of love interest increased.

Alexander Cowie gives an entertaining composite of the domestic sentimental novel:

First, take a young and not-too-pretty child about ten years old. Boys are possible, but girls are to be preferred, for the author and the increasing majority of women readers will be more at home. . . . Make sure that the child is, or shortly will be, an orphan. . . . [She] is now unhappy, undernourished, and underprivileged. . . . Her worst sin is her "pride." . . . Tears . . . inundate the book. . . . [She learns] to subdue her pride and to submit graciously to the suffering which is the lot of all mortals in this shabby world.15

Three of the most popular domestic novels were Susan Warner's The Wide, Wide World (1850), Maria Cummins' The Lamplighter (1854), and Augusta Evans Wilson's St. Elmo (1866). These will be discussed later in this paper.

Many of the domestic sentimentalists naturally became interested in the "causes" that abounded in the middle of the nineteenth century, such as Mesmerism, Mormonism, Bloomerism, Animal Magnetism, Transcendentalism, Spiritualism, Perfectionism, Teetotalism, Abolitionism, Phrenology, and Physiognomy. They sympathized with the reformers, who felt that if only enough Americans could be educated to see the problems that existed, the problems would be solved. Two of the causes that contributed to sentimental fiction were the abolition of slavery and the fight against alcohol.
In 1836, the temperance societies voted to utilize prose fiction in their battle against liquor. This gave rise to numerous temperance novels, including Franklin Evans (1842) by Walt Whitman; Confessions of a Reformed Inebriate (1844), anonymous; Ten Nights in a Bar-Room (1854), by T. S. Arthur; and Minnie Hermon (1857), by Thurlow Brown. Of these many novels, Arthur's Ten Nights was by far the most popular.

The temperance writers tended to view everything in life as either good or bad; they even attacked "moderation" as a tool of the Devil, insisting that the most innocent exception to total abstinence was certain to lead to ruin. They invented villains who practiced elaborate ruses to get that first drop of liquor past the hero's unsuspecting lips. And once the hero tasted that drop, he was consumed with a burning thirst which swept all before it in a mighty rush to destruction. Herbert Ross Brown claims that one of the requirements for writing a temperance novel was a total lack of humor, and it seems to have been true. In these books, the reader's emotions were bombarded with scenes of misery and privation, horrible brutality, abuse and murder of innocent children, graphic and imaginative accounts of delirium tremens; in fact, no sentimental devices were omitted to impress on the reader the evils of Demon Rum.

The temperance crusaders had much in common with the anti-slavery writers; in fact, many authors supported both causes. One of these was Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose Uncle...
Tom's Cabin (1852) eventually became the best-selling novel of nineteenth century America. Mrs. Stowe had actually intended her novel as a "pacificator," but her impassioned sincerity and her sensational descriptions of slave life awakened more emotional response in the nation than she expected. She used the sentimental devices of much sighing, weeping, exhortation, talk of heaven, and pitiful suffering. Mrs. Stowe also wrote another anti-slavery novel, Dred (1856), which sold over 100,000 copies but it is hardly remembered today.

Other abolitionist novels written during this period include The Slave (1848) by R. Hildreth, Our World (1855) by F. C. Adams, Slavery Unmasked (1856) by P. Tower, and Autobiography of a Female Slave (1857) by M. Griffiths. Pro-slavery writers rose up in reply with equally sentimental tales portraying happy slaves, kindly and humane masters, and idyllic plantations.

The sentimental philosophy was inadequate to resolve the slavery problem, with its well-intentioned but futile suggestions for gradual emancipation, amalgamation, buying up slaves and sending them away to colonies, and women's withholding their affections until their husbands and lovers should "voluntarily" free their slaves. The sentimentalists felt that moral revolutions should be accomplished by "the all-convincing power of Truth and Love"—never by physical force.

The sentimental era was one of intense religious activity. Every temperance and abolitionist writer took care first
of all to prove that his cause was based on the Bible. There was much interest in relating religion to life, and at the same time liberal ideas from Europe were beginning to replace the strict Puritan theology of the earlier years. The nobility of the human heart and the natural goodness of man were substituted for the old Calvinistic doctrine of natural depravity. Everyone, even the seducer, had potential for redemption.¹⁹

The sentimental novelists criticized the defenders of the old theology. Orestes Brownson drew an unflattering picture of a Calvinist pastor in Charles Elwood (1840). Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth made her villains either atheists or Calvinists.²⁰ Mrs. Stowe, on the other hand, presented the Calvinists with sympathetic understanding in The Minister's Wooing (1859).

These writers were alarmed at those who advocated living by morality, ethics, or reason only, without religion. The religion they insisted on was to be of the heart, with religious feelings and emotions. They wanted a kind of general Christianity, not burdened with a lot of theological doctrines or unpleasant realities.

Unitarianism, helped along by other "isms," had encouraged an emphasis on Christ's humanity rather than his divinity. Joseph Holt Ingraham dedicated The Prince of the House of David (1855) to reaffirming the divinity of Christ, hoping to refute the new ideas. Christ, human or divine,
continued to be a popular subject for novelists, and was often accorded the sentimental treatment.

In the age of realism following the Civil War, the sentimentalists continued to attract readers who preferred an escape rather than a challenge in their fiction. These writers upheld unrealistic ideals and denounced social evils in the old emotional way. In writing about the Civil War, the sentimentalists rarely took the war itself seriously but concentrated on social ideals. Southern writers refused to face reality, but wrote endless justifications of the Southern way of life as it was before the war. Mary Baker Eddy founded Christian Science in 1866, an escapist religion which one writer has called "the Sentimental Heresy institutionalized." Even in religion, the sentimentalists preferred to gloss over unpleasant facts by pretending that they did not exist.

During the nineteenth century, the sentimental novels functioned as a sort of moral clinic, dispensing religious and moral medicine mixed with the syrup of sensational or emotional narratives. The authors of these books loved explosive action and emotional crises. They were not given to long introductions, but rather plunged right into their stories. Some of their specific techniques were: Lavish use of dialogue to reveal character and indicate action; misfortunes and catastrophes of all kinds; an almost unbearable suspense, with numerous instances of the hero arriving five
minutes too late to save the heroine, etc.; mistaken or confused identity; death-bed scenes; and coincidences, no matter how unlikely. The final solution was always neatly reserved for the last chapter where the punishment was made to fit the crime and the reward to equal the virtue. Coincidence was used freely wherever needed to fulfill the plot. The reader, meanwhile, was made to cry—and wait.23

The heroine of the sentimental novel had one great mission in life—to refine and spiritualize man, and through him to improve the rest of the world. Her sphere of action was the home—women's rights might be debated, but marriage was the most important duty of woman and sweet wifely submission was the ideal of conduct. A mild, general benevolence was essential, and it was almost sinful not to love nature, especially flowers. It was woman's duty to sacrifice herself for others, and if she was fortunate she reigned over a happy domestic circle complete with an adoring, reformed husband and numbers of children lisping their gratitude; if her destiny was to recall sinners by an uncomplaining and lingering "decline," she gladly played her part to the end to teach the world how a Christian should die.24

There were many contradictions in the philosophy of sentimental fiction. For instance, children were regarded as "messengers from heaven" and often served as instruments of redemption when all else had failed; yet they received severe discipline as a matter of course. "Sensibility" was all-
important, yet parents were to teach principles to their children and never let mere feelings get the upper hand. Early sentimentalists urged charitable Christian deeds by individuals, but reform movements with their specific goals and definite commitments were uneasily regarded as radical; yet some of the most powerful and popular sentimental fiction was written to support the reform movements of abolition and temperance. T. S. Arthur was the first to criticize unscrupulous businessmen, harsh creditors and shiftless debtors, and others took up his banner enthusiastically, but few real solutions were proposed. Sex was never discussed openly, but somehow with all the circumlocutions and euphemisms, some of these novels managed to be as titillating and suggestive as the novels of today.

Specific examples of the general characteristics mentioned above can be found in three representative domestic sentimental novels, The Wide, Wide World, The Lamplighter, and St. Elmo.

Susan Warner's The Wide, Wide World, first published in December, 1850, became the first "best-seller" in American fiction. This book and Miss Warner's Queechy (1852) together sold 104,000 copies in three years. Many of the typical devices used by domestic novelists are found in this book. The heroine, Ellen Montgomery, is about ten years old. Her sick mother leaves her with unpleasant Aunt Fortune on a farm in New England. There are endless descriptions of the
day's work, such as washing dishes, mending, cleaning, etc. There are long discussions of how to live the good life and return good for evil. Ellen sometimes talks back to her aunt, but is remorseful afterwards. She has a dear friend, the saintly Alice Humphreys, who dies. Her mother and father then die also. Her aunt remarries, and Ellen goes to Scotland to live with other relatives. *The Wide, Wide World* has little plot, being merely a string of incidents, but there are many crises. There is much weeping and much kissing, but Ellen is never old enough for adult love. This book became so popular that allusions to it continued to appear in other literary works through the nineteenth century.

*The Lamplighter* (1854), by Maria Cummins, also contains the chief elements of the domestic sentimental novel. The little girl in *The Lamplighter* is Gerty, who is befriended by Trueman Flint, the lamplighter, and lives through many crises before finally becoming reunited with her father and marrying her childhood chum Willie. Humble submission to suffering is supposed to be the theme of the novel, but the author makes sure to reward her heroine with material wealth at the end.

Another popular domestic writer was Augusta Jane Evans Wilson, who wrote, among others, *Beulah* (1859) and *St. Elmo* (1866). *Beulah* deals with the life of an orphan from her childhood in the asylum through the usual quota of misfortunes to her eventual marriage. *St. Elmo* is a love story that uses
nearly all the devices of the sentimental novels. There is the spotlessly pure orphan heroine, Edna Earl; the wealthy benefactress, Mrs. Murray, whose son St. Elmo is wicked and cynical, but handsome; Edna's diligent writing at night after serving as governess to a crippled boy by day, and her literary success; St. Elmo's inevitable reform and decision to become a minister; Edna's renunciation of her career and the happy marriage at the end. Edna is too virtuous, even priggish, but her story is interesting and enjoyable even today.

This type of fiction, though perhaps rightly regarded as "sub-literary," should not be underestimated in the influence it had and continues to have on the minds and opinions of generations of eager readers. It is, indeed, as one writer has said, still "a power in the world."
FOUR REPRESENTATIVE NOVELS BY BERNIE BABCOCK

Since Mrs. Babcock's books have been described as sentimental novels, four of her books have been selected for a closer study. These are The Daughter of a Republican (1900), a temperance story and her first novel; The Soul of Ann Rutledge (1919), her most successful book and the first of her Lincoln series; The Coming of the King (1921), her Biblical romance; and Little Dixie Devil (1937), a slightly satiric social criticism and her last published novel.

The Daughter of a Republican is modeled on T. S. Arthur's Ten Nights in a Bar-Room and the many other temperance novels written since the 1840s. Donald Koch says that the characteristics of the temperance novel are the belabored thesis, the step-by-step decline of the inebriate, the lurid episodes of horror and death, the martyred innocents, and the all-pervading atmosphere of sanctimonious piety. This book has all these ingredients plus a love story between the high-minded heroine and a handsome young liquor dealer.

Mrs. Babcock begins her story with a minimum of exposition. The drunkard's family is described in the opening pages:

The Crowleys are all in tonight, except the father, and he is momentarily expected.
It is a bitter night in February. . . .
Against the pale red glow four small hands were visible, spread to catch the feeble heat.
On a bed in one corner, gaunt, and with wasted
form, a woman lay.
This was the mother.
A girl of perhaps fifteen sat close to the stove and held a tiny baby wrapped in a gingham apron.

Several characteristics of Mrs. Babcock's style are noticeable in the preceding quotation. She uses short paragraphs, composed of short sentences heavily larded with rather trite adjectives. Her vocabulary is simple, without literary allusion. She switches from present tense to past and back again. Not apparent in the example is her use of dialogue, which, although not very realistic, functions to keep the story moving.

Damon (note the similarity to "demon") Crowley, the father, is already nearly completely degraded, with none of the redeeming qualities of T. S. Arthur's Joe Morgan. Crowley never reforms, and is finally executed for murdering his little son while in a drunken rage. The handsome liquor dealer does reform, however, but only after becoming acquainted with the Crowley family; he sells his interest in the saloon, joins the Prohibition Party and wins the hand of the heroine, Judge Thorn's daughter Jean. Conventional as the plot is, the tale holds the reader's interest by the variety of action, the fast movement (the book is only 115 pages), and the appealing character of Jean Thorn. Mrs. Babcock also inserted into her book a plea for women's suffrage when Jean complains to her complacent Republican father that he can vote for liquor and
she cannot vote against it. There is a warning against smoking when a doctor, who should know better, lights up his pipe and puffs away.

In Jean Thorn we have our first introduction to Mrs. Babcock's typical heroine; we will meet her again in subsequent books. Like the heroines of the earlier domestic novels Jean is from an aristocratic, wealthy family, is beautiful, honest, versatile, musical, and loves flowers, animals and children. Unlike the earlier heroines, she is independent, strong-minded, outspoken, and not conventionally religious, although she has high moral principles. She is attractive to men, but like Edna Earl in St. Elmo, she refuses to marry a man who fails to meet her high standards of conduct. Except for the wealth, of course, this girl bears quite a resemblance to Bernie Babcock, herself.

Gilbert Allison, the handsome rum-seller, is something of a cardboard man, but the liquor dealer was so often portrayed as a scoundrel in temperance fiction that it is an imaginative twist to have one presented as an honest gentleman. Little else is revealed about his character, however, except that he is quite susceptible to Jean's charms. We are given only two views of Judge Thorn—he is either a doting old father or a dogmatic, opinionated politician.

The Daughter of a Republican is a simple, direct appeal for Prohibition. There was a market for this type of fiction,
it filled the need and was published, and as a result, Mrs. Babcock was encouraged to continue writing.

The *Soul of Ann Rutledge* (1919) was Bernie Babcock’s best-known book. In an advertisement dated 7 February 1920, the publishers, J. B. Lippincott Company, wrote "This remarkable book published inconspicuously last year has run to six editions and is destined to become, as we predicted, the favorite book about Lincoln in every American household." Assuming the ordinary printer’s edition was from 1000 to 5000 copies, this would indicate that at least 5000 and possibly 25,000 copies had been sold in less than a year. However, it was not listed on any of the "Top Ten" sellers lists in *Publisher's Weekly* for 1919 or 1920. The Lippincott edition was priced at $1.50 per copy. Grosset and Dunlap published it in 1923 priced at 75 cents, and again in 1934 priced at $1.00. A six-act play adapted from the novel was published in 1934 by the Ingram Company of Rock Island, Illinois. In 1954, Exposition Press published the "Fourth Edition, Revised and Enlarged" in which Mrs. Babcock had included replies to some attacks on her historical accuracy, as well as scenes from the play based on the novel.

Intrigued by the fact that she knew of no novels written about Lincoln’s love affair with Ann Rutledge, Mrs. Babcock had studied biographies by Herndon, Tarbell, Hay, Nicolay, and Rankin, and converted her information into a novel at a lucky
time. There was an upsurge of popular interest in Lincoln in America after World War I. The events of the war had brought Lincoln's attempts to prove that democracy was a workable form of government to the attention of scientists and scholars. The Soul of Ann Rutledge was successful, even though the reviewer in the 10 May 1919 Boston Transcript complained "the lack of an index is a less glaring defect than her failure to convince the reader of her adherence to fact or probability" (p. 10), and the 30 October 1919 London Times Literary Supplement said "there is even bathos" (p. 6B). Other reviewers were much kinder.

The story opens in New Salem, Illinois, in 1831, with Ann Rutledge and her girl friend going to the river to view a flat boat stuck on the dam at the mill. The captain of the boat is tall, ugly and ungainly, but acts as if "he's had lessons in manners." Of course, this is Abe Lincoln, who soon moves to New Salem and opens a general store.

Mrs. Babcock depended heavily on dialogue to carry the story. In fact, the first sentence of the book is "Ann! Ann! Ann Rutledge! Hallo! Hallo!" The conversations are fairly easy and colloquial, except that Ann and Abe address each other with too much formality. In a romantic evening scene in the old mill, Ann has been telling Abe that God would help him and that light always follows darkness.
"How do you know it?" he asked, turning to her. "Tell me how you know it—or why you believe so strongly."

"Let us sit down," she said, "here where the light is fading on the river. See, only the foam shines now. But in just a little while the moon will put a thousand bars of silver on the water. We are not afraid of the dark—you and I—nor of each other. I want to tell you a story." (p. 237)

This passage illustrates not only the stilted way in which Ann speaks to her friend, but the simple style of the book. Even in Ann's poetic utterances, short words are used. There are few literary allusions in the book—one to Pilgrim's Progress, one to Shakespeare, and a few to the Bible.

The period of the book covers about four years. Various episodes in the life of Lincoln are described as they "could have" happened. Mrs. Babcock included some of her favorite themes in the book; for instance, there is a chapter describing the miserable poverty of a drunkard's family. There is also a sarcastic description of an emotional religious meeting. Abe Lincoln's religious views are set forth in detail. He believed in the love and mercy of God, but didn't believe in Hell, so naturally he could not be a member of any of the local churches. But Mrs. Babcock insisted that he was a better Christian than the church members were. Mrs. Babcock also had Lincoln tell Ann that he believed the Bible hinted at a romance between Jesus and Mary, the sister of Martha. This was the topic of Mrs. Babcock's next book.
True to the tradition of the sentimental novel, Ann Rutledge wastes away of a consumption-like disease. Her death scene is pathetic to the extreme; and after she dies, Abe speaks:

"Ann! Ann!"
Again the silence.
Then with such a groan as voices the agony of the human soul, he whispered hoarsely: "My God—why hast Thou forsaken me!" (pp. 292-93)

Placing the words of Christ in Abe Lincoln's mouth is a crude kind of symbolism, but it is easily understood; just as is the silver lining of the cloud in the following paragraph toward the end of the book:

The somber man in the gathering shadows lifted his eyes from the low mound to a cloud-bank rimmed with silver. The mask of sorrow seemed suddenly to have softened. A faint smile lit his face as he said reverently, "Soul of Ann Rutledge—yes, I believe." (p. 323)

Ann's character is well drawn in this book. She is a perfect sentimental heroine, much like Jean Thorn in the earlier book. She has no faults, nor has Abe Lincoln. According to Mrs. Babcock, Abe is brave, humble, intelligent, resourceful, easy-going, and unbelievably honest. Babies, old folks, tough hoodlums, and ministers all like Abe. The other characters are one-dimensional.

The Coming of the King (1921) is a love story involving Jesus and Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Although one reviewer thought it equal to Ben Hur and The Other Wise
Man, there are flaws in the style and content that lessen its effectiveness.

This novel characteristically depends on dialogue to tell the story; therefore, it seems glaringly incongruous to have the characters speak in pseudo-Elizabethan English. Mrs. Babcock attempted to render modern idiom and at the same time use "thee," "thou," and the obsolete verb endings. As an example, when the Roman soldiers break into the home of Sara, a Jewish girl, the following passage is found:

"What goeth on?" one soldier shouted, while the other walked across the room and looked into the kitchen.

When Lazarus is asked about Jesus' accomplishment in bringing him back to life after three days in the tomb, he says, "Even Jesus doth make no claim of bringing back to life those whose flesh hath turned black." And when Jesus and Mary speak of love in the lily garden, these stilted and totally unbelievable words are attributed to Jesus:

"Sit thou close to me, aye, so close that not the shadow of a silver olive leaf can come between our souls--thy soul and mine, for since mine eyes first beheld thee on the Temple porch thou hast been more to me than thou canst ever know..." (p. 90)

One of the flaws in content is Mrs. Babcock's annoying habit of taking Jesus' well-known sayings and placing them in an unexpected context. An instance of this occurs when Jesus brings Mary a bouquet of orange blossoms, and as he approaches
the house, he calls out loudly, "Behold! I stand at the door and knock."

Mrs. Babcock's unorthodox religious views appear everywhere in the story. Jesus talks about "Waves of Being," denies that miracles exist, and calls himself Deathless Love Revealed. Mrs. Babcock gave unorthodox explanations of many of the events given in the Bible involving Jesus. For instance, she claimed that he was safely sleeping in the boat when the disciples "imagined" they saw his spirit walking on the water. He consulted a Hindu philosopher to obtain a cure for Sara's leprosy. It turns out that Lazarus was not really dead when Jesus called him forth from the tomb. Far from going voluntarily to his atoning death on the cross, he was said to be planning a trip to the East right after Passover to stay until the political situation cooled down around Jerusalem. Instead of being betrayed by Judas, who did not even appear in the book, Jesus was betrayed by the money-changer whose table he had overturned in the Temple. Clearly, Mrs. Babcock emphasizes Jesus' humanity, not his divinity.

Mrs. Babcock brings into this novel some elements which are not religious. There is a discussion of the oppression of the working men and a description of a guild, or early labor union. (Possibly because of these passages, this book was praised by labor papers as defending the cause of labor.) Pontius Pilate is portrayed as a drunkard, who
indulges in all the brutality of his kind, as so often outlined in the temperance novels.

The book is divided into three parts—the Prologue, when Jesus was six or eight years old; Part I, events of A. D. 32; and Part II, A. D. 33. The plot is episodic and shifts from one scene to another abruptly.

The main characters are fairly well rounded. Mary, as might be expected, is much like Ann Rutledge, with her love of flowers, music, small animals, and long religious discussions. Martha, on the other hand, represents the practical, efficient side of Mrs. Babcock's own character. Jesus is portrayed as being like Abraham Lincoln—a strong man upon whom others lean, but who would like a woman to lean on himself. There is a good satiric caricature of Zador Ben Amon, the wealthy, lascivious Jewish merchant and money-changer who wants Mary for himself. The other characters are not well developed.

Despite the weaknesses that have been mentioned, Mrs. Babcock was still able to hold the reader's interest with her ability to tell a good story. This, along with the built-in appeal of a story based on the Bible, was enough to insure at least moderate sales of the book. It was first published by Bobbs-Merrill in 1921 and then brought out by Grosset and Dunlap in another edition the same year.

**Little Dixie Devil** (1937) is about Miss Billy Alexander, the "scion of an old aristocratic Southern family," who comes
home from school to live with three genteel elderly aunts. While they worry about what to do with the lively girl, Billy shocks them at her debut ball first by dancing fast dances, then further by closing down the bar and refusing to serve alcoholic drinks to her guests. Later, after being disappointed by the hypocrisy of her several suitors, Billy decides to study social work and goes to New York to visit her ex-roommate, Jane Bierce, who lives with her older brother, a respected judge. Billy becomes involved in a garment workers' strike her first day in New York, and, after publicly declaring herself in support of women's rights, is sentenced to six months in the workhouse by the judge (Judge Bierce, of course). Her friends get her out of the workhouse in two days, then she tries to adopt the baby of a poor family, but the judge is able to get the husband a job and the mother takes back her baby. The judge proposes, and Billy gladly gives up her career and accepts him.

This is the most satiric of Mrs. Babcock's books. There is still some of the invective and direct denunciation of evil found in her earlier books, but also much irony and indirect criticism. There is satiric treatment of the old ladies who censure fast dancing, but are willing to serve "liquid poison" (alcohol) to their guests because it is the "social" thing to do. Her satiric caricatures of Billy's lovers are amusing--Brighton Day, the social lion (who drinks too much); Henry O. Bean, who is both stingy and whiney; Fayette Journey (pro-
nounced Zhur-nay), who has a bad temper and doesn't like children; Congressman Frederic Blanche, who wants a wife to be a social asset; Rev. Ezekial Bumpast, who needs a wife to help in his evangelistic campaigns; and Captain Sidney Larvante, a handsome, fortune-hunting professional soldier.

Although the dialogue is often stilted and overly formal, characteristic of Mrs. Babcock's books, Billy's impudent and sarcastic remarks make entertaining reading. For a mother of five, Mrs. Babcock seemed curiously uninterested in writing about children. The children in *The Daughter of a Republican* were stereotypes; there were no children in the other two books examined; and in this novel the baby that Billy tries to adopt is called "it" for 16 pages before the reader is told in a letter to Aunt Nan that "it" is a girl.

The character of Billy is that of an emancipated Jean Thorn in *The Daughter of a Republican*, and Judge Bierce is just a younger edition of Judge Thorn. Thus, two of the characters in this last novel parallel two in her first novel. As usual, the minor characters in *Little Dixie Devil* are not fully developed.

In this last novel, Bernie Babcock demonstrated that, though she could still tell a good story, at age 69 she was losing touch with the times. The story of a wealthy socialite could hardly have appealed to many readers in the depression-ridden 30s. At any rate, no second edition was called for.
A TWENTIETH CENTURY SENTIMENTAL NOVELIST

Mrs. Babcock became a writer for the same reason that many of the women sentimental writers of the nineteenth century did—she had to support her family. Her writings are similar to theirs in many ways, also. Some of the more noticeable resemblances are: Most of Mrs. Babcock's books have a woman as the leading character; this woman is interested in a man whom she improves or enlightens in some way by her example; her ultimate goal, of course, is marriage. Her books have a didactic message. She makes free use of coincidence to fulfil the needs of her plots; for example, when Billy Alexander, the heroine of Little Dixie Devil, is arrested in New York City, it just "happens" that the judge who sentences her is the brother of her former roommate. Her novels tend to plunge into the action with a minimum of exposition, and often dialogue carries the major burden of the narrative. Calamities and misfortunes are common, but the novels always have happy endings. She stresses scenes and incidents calculated to cause an emotional response in the reader; one example of this would be Ann Rutledge's death-bed scene. The plots are episodic and trite; the structure of The Soul of Ann Rutledge is episodic (a series of separate events) like that of The Wide, Wide World. The trite plot of Little Dixie Devil, in which Billy refuses her suitor and goes to New York to do social work parallels that of St. Elmo when Edna
Earl refuses her suitor and goes to New York to become a governess. In both novels, the heroine promptly renounces her career in order to marry the man she loves.

The following are corresponding passages from Mrs. Babcock's books and some of the outstanding sentimental fiction of the nineteenth century. In each set of quotations, Mrs. Babcock's work is placed first.

It has already been stated that Mrs. Babcock's first novel was patterned after the temperance fiction of T. S. Arthur and his followers. The theme of prohibition is clearly stated in the following:

[The Prohibition Party platform is] "We favor the legal prohibition by state and national legislation of the manufacture, importation and sale of alcoholic beverages."

"Eureka!" she shouted. "I am not alone. How many others like me?"

"A quarter of a million, I presume," he answered, a trifle grimly. (The Daughter of a Republican, p. 39)

"No! no! In heaven's name, then, let the traffic cease! To this end, I offer these resolutions:

'Be it resolved by the inhabitants of Cedarville, that from this day henceforth, no more intoxicating drink shall be sold within the limits of the corporation.'"

(Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, p. 125)

In the sentimental novels, dialogue often carries the action of the story for pages at a time. Another way dialogue is used is to stress the religious emphasis of the book:
"But he plays fair."

"I never could understand why women and girls like the fighting kind, the rowdy kind—the kind that has roustabout ways, and that has no business, and opposes religion."

"But are you sure he opposes religion?"

"These fighting roustabouts generally do. Now don't get mixed. I'm not saying Abe Lincoln's not a good fellow. He's good enough of his kind, and I like him. But for women and girls that's religious, he wouldn't be my kind."

"I'm going to find out if he opposes religion," Ann said.

(The Soul of Ann Rutledge, p. 82)

"It is nothing, Mr. Van Brunt," said Ellen, bursting into tears again,—"only I thought you were asleep—I—I thought you didn't care enough about the Bible to keep awake—I want so much that you should be a Christian!"

He half groaned and turned his head away.

"What makes you wish that so much?" said he, after a minute or two.

"Because I want you to be happy," said Ellen,—"and I know you can't without."

"Well, I am pretty tolerable happy," said he;—"as happy as most folks, I guess."

"But I want you to be happy when you die, too," said Ellen,—"I want to meet you in Heaven."

(The Wide, Wide World, p. 430)

Even though dialogue is so important in the sentimental novels, it is often stilted and improbable:

"No," she said firmly, "I would tell you first what my strange speech means. Be seated, just here." She showed him to the chair Jane had placed by the table on which the roses and the ring box were.

(Little Dixie Devil, p. 147)

"You aregrieved about something, which you are unwilling to confide to me. Edna, it is keen pain that sometimes brings that quiver to your lips, and if you would only tell me! Edna, I know that I—"

"You conjure up a spectre..." (St. Elmo, p. 208)
In tender or emotional moments, the characters typically recite speeches in high-flown language that is far from realistic:

"First, may I pin a sprig of wild plum on your coat for luck? It's almost too early for them yet and I searched the thicket before I found this, which looks as if it had only half opened its white eyes, but it gives but its spring-time fragrance to stir up happy memories and hopes."

(The Soul of Ann Rutledge, p. 169)

"In mercy?" exclaimed Philip. "What mercy does my past experience give evidence of, or your life of everlasting darkness? Can you believe it a loving hand which made me the ill-fated instrument, and you the life-long sufferer, from one of the dreariest misfortunes that can afflict humanity?"

(The Lamplighter, p. 494)

Mrs. Babcock, like the earlier sentimental writers, let no opportunity slip by for an emotional description with a moral message. These descriptive passages call attention to the contrast between the rich and the poor:

It is a bitter night in February. The ground is covered with ice and sleet causing many a fall to the unwary pedestrian. . . .

There were those who did not mind this storm, people around whose homes all was secure and whom no rattling annoyed, people who enjoyed bright lights and warm fires, but these were not the Crowley's. The Crowley's home consisted of two rooms in a rickety old tenement house around which everything rattled and flapped as the wind raged.

(The Daughter of a Republican, pp. 5-6)
It was a chilly evening in November, and a light fall of snow, which had made everything look bright and clean in the pleasant open squares, near which the fine houses of the city were built, had only served to render the narrow streets and dark lanes dirtier and more cheerless than ever; for, mixed with the mud and filth which abound in those neighborhoods where the poor are crowded together, the beautiful snow had lost all its purity. 

(The Lamplighter, p. 5)

The sentimental novelists could not resist death-bed scenes, and Mrs. Babcock was no exception:

"I'll begin again and sing through from the first --sing it all. But Abraham, put the big shawl, that's on the foot of the bed, up here handy."

"Are you cold, Ann?"

"No, not yet--but I feel--feel strange."

He put the shawl beside her.

"It's handy now. I'll sing."

Again she sang the lines "I'm a pilgrim--I'm a stranger--" She was singing slower now. When she came to the words "I can tarry," she stopped a moment.

"The shawl, Abraham, wrap it about me tightly."

"Let me call your mother," he said as he wrapped the shawl about her.

"Not just yet--not until I finish my song. I will hurry. 'I can tarry--I can tarry--'"

Again the song was interrupted by a struggle for breath, and she seemed to be swallowing something.

"Put your arms around me--I want to finish." Her voice wavered. Then came the words quite clearly, but sounding very far away, "'Do--not--detain--me--'"

Again there was a slight struggle for breath, and her head fell against his breast.

"Ann! Ann! What's the matter, Ann?"

She did not answer.

He put his hand under her chin and turned her face toward him. A film was forming over the half-closed violet eyes.

"Ann! My God! Ann!" The words were wrung from him now in fear and agony.

Warm and close she lay in his arms like a little child--but she was silent.

(The Soul of Ann Rutledge, p. 291)
Alice knew his step, she knew his horse's step, too well; she had raised herself up and stretched out both arms towards him before he entered. In another moment they were round his neck, and she was supported in his. There was a long, long silence.

"Are you happy, Alice?" whispered her brother. "Perfectly. This was all I wanted. Kiss me, dear John."

As he did so, again and again, she felt his tears on her cheek, and put up her hand to his face to wipe them away; kissed him then, and then once again laid her head on his breast. They remained so a little while without stirring; except that some whispers were exchanged too low for others to hear, and once more she raised her face to kiss him. A few minutes after those who could look saw his color change; he felt the arms unclasp their hold; and as he laid her gently back on the pillow they fell languidly down; the will and the power that had sustained them were gone. Alice was gone; but the departing spirit had left a ray of brightness on its earthly house; there was a half smile on the sweet face, of most entire peace and satisfaction. Her brother looked for a moment,—closed the eyes,—kissed, once and again, the sweet lips,—and left the room. (The Wide, Wide World, pp. 457-58)

A significant difference between Mrs. Babcock's writing and that of the earlier authors can be demonstrated by the following descriptions of delirium tremens as experienced by the drunkards of two stories. Although the subject matter is the same, Mrs. Babcock's style seems much more vivid, direct, and economical than T. S. Arthur's:

From the corners of his cell dark faces leered at him; cruel, sharp claws closed around his limbs and icy fingers grasped his throat—yet he was not dead. Snarling beasts sank their fangs into his flesh, a thousand poison insects rushed and swarmed upon him, and he felt the virus of their sting bounding through his body—yet he lived. Slimy serpents wriggled over him, thrusting their forked tongues into his nose and ears, and when he grabbed frantically to tear them away they had gone. (The Daughter of a Republican, p. 102)
Oh! what a shudder of despair seized upon the heart of the wretched wife. Too well she knew the fearful signs of that terrible madness from which, twice before, he had suffered. . . .

Joe took a step or two toward the bed, looking sharply into it as he did so. From the bed his eyes wandered up to the ceiling, and the old look of terror came into his face.

"There it is now! Jump out of bed, quick! Jump out Mary!" he cried. "See! it's right over your head."

... "Aha! There it is now, creeping along the floor!" he suddenly exclaimed, fearfully; starting away from where he stood.

(Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, pp. 39, 45)

These passages illustrate some of the resemblances between Bernie Babcock's work and that of the earlier sentimental novelists, as well as one important difference. By utilizing these characteristics of the sentimental novel while employing a more vivid and direct prose style and to some extent more up-to-date topics, Mrs. Babcock was able to write marketable novels. The popularity of such twentieth-century authors as Gene Stratton-Porter, Kathleen Norris, Grace Livingston Hill, Harold Bell Wright, Edna Ferber, Willa Cather, Lloyd Douglas, James Hilton, and many others, and the fact that Bernie Babcock's books were popular and one was a best-seller, indicate that interest in sentimental fiction extended into the twentieth century. The vogue of "soap operas," first on radio and later on television, is a further suggestion of the timeless appeal of sentimental fiction. Bernie Babcock is just one representative of the writers who have provided America with this type of literature in the twentieth century.
NOTES


2 Willa Marie Oliver, "An Appreciation of the Life and Writings of Bernle Babcock," M. A. Thesis George Peabody College, 1932, page numbers not legible. Plot summaries of all Mrs. Babcock's books through 1932 can be found in this study.

3 Oliver, n. p.

4 Mrs. Albert E. Bakker, "Bernie Babcock Made Notable Contributions to Literature--and History," Arkansas Gazette, 22 July 1962, p. 4E.

5 Personal letter from Mrs. McRaven, dated December 29, 1970.


7 Oliver, n. p.


10 Personal letter from Mrs. McRaven, dated December 29, 1970.


13 Cowie, p. 11.

14 Cowie, p. 413.

15 Cowie, p. 413.

17 Cowie, p. 449.
18 Cowie, p. 453.
19 Brown, p. 143.
20 Brown, p. 325.
23 Brown, p. 176.
24 Brown, p. 113.
27 Cowie, p. 412.
31 This is a so-called "vanity" press. Probably Mrs. Babcock paid to have her book published.
33 The favorable reviews are found in Book Review Digest: Reviews of 1919 Books (New York: Wilson, 1920), p. 20.
35 Oliver, n. p.
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