Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, ed. *The Life and Letters of Annie Leake Tuttle: Working for the Best.* Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999. Pp. xvii, 147.

In the summer of 1897, 58-year-old Annie Leake Tuttle—wife, stepmother, former teacher and missionary—sat down to write her life story. In itself this was not an unusual undertaking. As Margaret Conrad and others have demonstrated, Nova Scotian women, particularly evangelical Protestants like Annie, have been engaging in the autobiographical act for at least two hundred and fifty years. But the life Annie set out to describe was no ordinary one. Indeed, her story should be of considerable interest, especially to historians and scholars of women's life writing.

A member of the first generation of Canadian women to gain access to Normal school training, Annie was an enthusiastic exponent of modern educational praxis throughout her long career as a classroom teacher and as a Normal school instructor in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Self-possessed, deeply spiritual, and always eager for new challenges, she entered the mission field shortly after she left teaching, becoming the first director of the Chinese Rescue Home in Victoria, B.C. Thus, at the age of 48, Annie joined the ranks of that first cohort of single women to work under the auspices of the Canadian Methodist Women's Missionary Society. But Annie's career, her search for ways to express her religious convictions, and her pursuit of new opportunities to be "useful," as she put it, were far from her only preoccupations. She was equally devoted to her family, willingly sacrificing time and finances to provide the assistance they from time to time required of her.

Marilyn Färdig Whiteley has provided us with both a fascinating portrait of an individual life and a thoughtful exploration of the context and motivations that prompted Annie to record her experiences. Initially her autobiography is a didactic exercise and memoir combined; writing as both the subject of her own story and a "witness" to the past, Annie recounts the events and experiences of her early life for the benefit and edification of her nieces and nephews, so they might preserve their family heritage. No doubt, given her training and the realities of her social world, it was at first easier for this respectable, middle-class Victorian woman to justify writing about herself in the voice of moral tutor or family chronicler. But Whiteley notes that autobiography is also a means to claim an identity when the foundations of one's life have radically shifted, as Annie's did in 1902 with the death of Milledge Tuttle, her husband of only seven years. Hard work and "usefulness" had been her cornerstones, yet at 63, without a home she could call her own and considered too old to return to either teaching or missionary work, Annie no longer had a definite, valued social role upon which to base her sense of self. Whiteley notes that as Annie uses her autobiography to search her past for the coherence and meaning that her life suddenly lacked, her narrative takes on a different character, reflecting more and more of Annie-as-subject. Essentially, in writing her life story Annie engaged, at the profoundest of levels, in the process of re-calling herself into being.

Happily, Annie was a gifted writer. Her descriptions—of her early life on the family farm, of her first experiences at school and of her subsequent determination to obtain a good education regardless of the personal cost, and of her refusal, on a number of occasions, to allow people to exploit or manipulate her —are evocative and strong. She writes compellingly of her conversion experience, of her first love, and of her years as a teacher.

It is interesting that the portrait of her later experiences—as a missionary, as the wife of Milledge Tuttle, and as an active volunteer for the Methodist Women's Missionary Society—is drawn with much less detail and clarity. Perhaps she was losing momentum; Annie wrote her life history over a period of 23 years, on and off. Perhaps, too, she felt more circumspect about later events; her missionary career ended under something of a cloud, her life with her husband and stepchildren may have felt too personal to discuss, and her volunteer work may have been too much a part of her daily life for her to see the need for a more complete account. Fortunately, Whiteley has been able to augment Annie's later sometimes rather abbreviated recollections with letters Annie wrote to friends and family, as well as school documents, missionary reports, and other writings. The life history that emerges is much more articulate as a result.

As Whiteley makes clear, Annie's autobiography tells much more than one woman's story: it allows us access to the everyday mores, assumptions, constraints, and joys for women of Annie's class and culture. Through her eyes we see a little of what it was like to grow up in rural Nova Scotia in the mid-nineteenth century. We gain a sense of the dominant attitudes about education—in particular, the education of women—and of the circumstances that attended the transition to a new model of schooling in the Maritimes. We learn something about the place of religion in Nova Scotian society, about the workings of complex family networks, and even the changing contours of class. Moreover, Annie's account allows us to make some interesting inferences about what life was like for single women, for young teachers, for home missionaries, for widows, and for aging women at the turn of the century.

An excellent example of the life writing genre, Whiteley's book allows Annie to tell her own story in her own way. In brief introductory discussions to each chapter, Whiteley provides thoughtful examination of the social context of both the era and the life stage that Annie describes. The end result is a satisfyingly well-rounded picture of one woman's remarkable life.

Cathy L. James
Queen's University