Chapter 8

Almanacs and the Profits of Natural Knowledge

Katharine Anderson

The Victorian almanac reached backward to a long tradition of popular literature. Its hallmark was age: a stability of form connected the almanacs of the present to those of centuries past, with their calendars, astronomical positions, and prophecy. Many of the best selling almanacs played to this tradition, retaining established titles and ‘old’ authors, and celebrating their longevity as did Old Poor Robin in 1828, with ‘One Hundred and Sixty-third Edition’ prominent on the title page. However, the key to the almanac in the nineteenth century is to understand how far this air of antiquity was spurious. Almanacs were thoroughly modern publications and flourished for the same reasons that other periodicals did: the emergence of concentrated and literate populations; technologies that facilitated paper-making, printing, and illustration; and the dismantling of taxes on the press.

Almanacs were a distinctive class of publication, however, for several reasons that make them both important and neglected resources. One was the absolute scale of their audience. Referring to ‘Old Moore’s’ Vox Stellarum, which sold 517,000 copies in 1838, the reformer and publisher Charles Knight decried ‘the two shilling’s [sic] worth of imposture’ in almost every home in ‘Southern England’. Writing about the world of Victorian print, Louis James called them ‘the most widely diffused and least known type of printed ephemera’, and commented that ‘even cottages without a broadsheet or chapbook would be likely to have a sheet almanac pinned to the wall’. Maureen Perkins’s modern study of almanacs concurs with these opinions. In 1839 the total almanac output of the Stationers’ Company (including the giant Vox Stellarum) was nearly 700,000; but it is estimated that at least that many again were sold outside its control, mainly in provincial markets. Lifting the taxes on almanacs in the 1830s unleashed a flood that had already proved difficult if not futile to control. Yet as important as sheer numbers was the variety. To associate almanacs with rural readers of chapbooks and to emphasize unduly the largest and ‘lowest’ titles can be misleading. Almanacs reached all social classes. Especially after the dominance of the Stationers’ Company faded, almanacs were marketed to every conceivable niche of the population. The Mirror of Literature noted in a review of almanacs in 1824 that there was ‘variety enough to suit all tastes’. It became increasingly common for other periodicals to put out their own almanac monthly or as a separate annual publication, so that almanacs wove themselves into the general diversity of the print marketplace.
The proliferation of almanacs created the circumstances for a second, distinctive aspect of the genre. This was their place in debates over cultural reform in the 1830s and 1840s. As quintessential mass reading, on the one hand, and as inheritors of astrological and radical traditions on the other, almanacs presented a vital target for reformers seeking to discipline modern culture. The almanac offered an apt symbolic vehicle in the debates over the 'condition of England', as we will consider shortly. For the historian of science, however, almanacs have a third important feature. Many of the other chapters in this volume describe how new forms of print and natural knowledge mutually constituted each other’s prominence in the cultural life of the nation. Almanacs, however, approached these transformations of audience, disciplines and technologies as established resources for natural knowledge. Here the stability of the genre becomes an important consideration. The essential components of the almanacs were calendars. Calendars linked the natural and human worlds, connecting the sequence of seasons and planetary motions to worldly cycles of academic terms, legal sessions, and fairs. A miscellany of planting advice, weather proverbs, tidal records, medical treatments, as well as astrology and illustrations of the macrocosm-microcosm relationship, made up the almanac’s traditional content. In short, the dominant purpose of the genre was instruction and reference, and it was centred on accounts of time and the activity of the cosmos. These purposes readily shifted to accounts of modern developments in astronomy, meteorology, and other sciences. The regular features of an almanac thus often provided opportunities to record and respond to changing accounts of the natural world. Underlining these opportunities for debate about natural knowledge was the tension surrounding prophecy and astrology. The almanac as a type was Janus-faced, equally evoking its reputation for ‘useful information’ and ‘imposture’ (the Mirror of Literature referred to Old Poor Robin as a series of ‘gross libels on public taste’). We can see how almanacs offered a focus for tensions about social and intellectual authority that was characteristic of the early Victorian period and was characteristically embedded in discussions of natural knowledge.\textsuperscript{7} Examining the coverage of scientific subjects in the almanac, we can show how this periodical form enacted debates about authoritative knowledge. Before looking more closely at two examples of science in the almanacs, however, the position of almanac publication in the debate about the 'condition of England' must be outlined. Its concerns with credulity, commerciality, and civilized society were the backdrop for the arguments of Zadkiel’s Almanac and the visual experiments of the Illustrated London Almanack.

Almanacs and the Reform of Popular Culture

Almanacs are both simple to define and difficult to categorize. They were yearly publications containing a calendar and diverse other contents which varied enormously. They could be issued in sheet form—a single closely printed page, perhaps for posting in some public place—or book form, which ranged from a few to a few hundred pages. The arrangement of the typical contents of an almanac expressed its individual character. To accompany its calendars, tables, chronologies, and lists, editors of book almanacs often included articles on subjects of interest. Prophetic political commentary was the most notorious feature. However, commentary could also address astronomy and statistics, history and folklore, domestic economy and gardening. Even this scanty characterization of the almanac gives us reasons for further mapping out the almanac production of the nineteenth century, especially from the point of view of historians interested in popular science. The place of almanacs in debates about cultural authority, however, adds much to their significance. That role hinged above all on questions of profits and circulation. The legitimate market for almanacs was dominated by the Stationers’ Company, which held a monopoly until 1775, when a court decision put its sole right of publication in jeopardy. After that date and until 1834, control was sustained instead by high duties and takeover tactics, or by buying up the rights to successful rival products. The Stationers’ list, known as the English Stock, included twenty-five titles in 1801, ranging from titles like the Gentleman’s Diary and the Ladies' Diary—respectable, even intellectual, but of limited circulation—to Moore’s Vox Stellarum—astrological, crude, and immensely profitable. According to the 1801 'Statement of Almanacks' in the records of the Stationers’ Company, the Gentleman’s Diary sold 2648 copies and made 1s. profit in 1801; the Ladies Diary sold 6781 copies and brought in over £54; while Vox Stellarum sold 362,449 copies and made a profit of nearly £2600.\textsuperscript{8} However, by 1833 a survey produced by the publisher Charles Knight for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge estimated that legitimate almanacs made up only a small percentage of sales. Considering that the typical legitimate almanac price of 2s. 3d. was being challenged by prices as low as 6d. or 2d. for the unstamped publications, this estimate seems entirely plausible. In 1834, the Stamp Acts, which had imposed duties of 1s. 3d. on almanacs since 1797, were repealed. Prices dropped sharply and the variety of almanacs rose as more publishers could afford to float an almanac. The happy position of the Stationers’ Company following these changes underscores the value of the market. Although they had fought the repeal, the Company continued to improve its profits thereafter. In 1833 it recorded profits of about £4000 spread over eleven titles; in 1835, it cut prices, doubled sales and made profits of £5000.\textsuperscript{7}

These figures are noteworthy because they demonstrate the size of the audience for almanacs. They also show how the scale of the market was central to contemporaries’ understanding of the publications. Almanacs were ‘reading for the million’, and evidence indicated to contemporaries that the lower the tone, the higher the circulation. Prophetic almanacs like Moore’s Vox Stellarum sold much more widely than the mathematical Ladies’ Diary. The connection between superstition and sales galvanized Charles Knight and the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge. Knight began to campaign against the Company’s privileges in 1827, as soon as he joined the SDUK, and in 1828 he published the first British Almanac and its Companion of feature articles. Knight’s British Almanac, its publication costs heavily subsidized, was designed to lift the almanac from its association with superstition and ignorance. In targeting the genre, Knight and his supporters seized above all on the hypocrisy and venality of the Stationers'
only on past and present, but also on 'prognostications' for the future—and by his denunciations of quack remedies to treat the national crisis. Morison's Pills, the patent medicine that served as Carlyle's symbol of a misguided, mis-doctored nation, were sold in the same newsagents and print shops that had sprung up to distribute popular literature, including almanacs. In the same year that Carlyle wrote Past and Present, Herbert Ingram, a publisher with strictly commercial (in distinction to political) ambitions for his newspaper, had bankrolled the new Illustrated London News with the profits from his promotion of a direct competitor to Morison's Pills, Old Parr's Life pills, boxes of which lined his first London premises. Newly arrived in London from Nottingham, Ingram published Old Moore's Almanack—one of many imitators of the successful Vox Stellarum—primarily as an advertising medium for Parr's pills. The patent medicine connection was a notorious ingredient in Ingram's success. It underlined the fundamentally commercial relations of modern print enterprises with the new reading classes—relations which Thomas Carlyle, Charles Knight, and others watched with much unease. When Carlyle wrote in Past and Present of patent nostrums, the flimsiness of contemporary opinion, and the emptiness of modern authorities, the almanac was part of his sub-text. Almanacs presented the disturbing picture of popular influence out of all proportion to their financial and intellectual weight.

Behind these concerns, we might trace another reading of the almanac's place in contemporary debates about modern life. Almanacs tangibly represented national affairs. Their pages presented an annual summary of the state of the realm, whether this took secular and statistical form, like a tally of the national debt, or traditional and prophetic form, in the shape of Old Moore's symbol-laden hieroglyphic (Fig. 8.1). With their chronologies, anniversaries, and histories, they described the events and personalities that had created modern Britain. In an age when leaders searched for ways to analyse and reform the nation, the symbolic associations of the almanac with time and history were potent. At some level, to reform such forms of literature was to rationalize the national destiny itself.

Zadkiel's Almanac: Astrology and Meteorology

Almanacs embodied the contests of Victorian cultural life—the pressure to build an enlightened reading public and the differing conceptions of 'useful knowledge' that made this process a constant struggle. The remainder of this chapter will explore two instances of the negotiation of knowledge reflected in almanacs. The first example shows how one astrological almanac positioned itself as spokesman for scientific reform and as a popular voice in contemporary scientific debates.

The most notorious and enduring of the almanacs that emerged in the 1820s were astrological ones. Among these was Zadkiel's Almanac (Fig. 8.2), founded in 1829 and selling at a typical price of 2s. from 1829 to 1833, and 1s. after the repeal of the Stamp Acts changed the market. From 1847, Zadkiel's Almanac lowered its price to 6d. and claimed a circulation ranging from 22,000 to 32,000 for a forty-eight to sixty-four page issue. Circulation peaked in the early 1860s after it
apparently predicted the death of the Prince Consort. ‘Zadkiel’ was the pseudonym of Lieutenant Richard James Morrison (1795–1874), perhaps the most famous Victorian astrologer, who continued to publish the almanac until his death in 1874, when the title—in a process typical of successful almanacs—was sold to another leading astrologer.11

From the beginning Zadkiel’s positioned itself as part of the expansion of natural knowledge. Its editor pointedly rejected the impious reputation of astrology and presented readers with a version that was fully reconcilable with natural theology and free will. For Zadkiel, a reformed astrology involved not only reasserting the old principles of astrology but also demonstrating the connections between astral influence and the new sciences of the Victorian period, like mesmerism, electricity, astrophysics, and spectroscopy. He campaigned vigorously against the legal penalties attached to astrology by forming a British Association for the Advancement of Astral Science (BAAAS) in imitation of the conventional British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS).12 Another striking instance of Zadkiel’s response to developments in scientific culture emerged from the way any commentary about the almanac was reprinted verbatim in its pages. This could be interpreted as a display of his notoriety, but the exchange of critique and response thus built into his almanac also enacted Zadkiel’s pleas for open debate about astrological science. Similarly, the timing of the publication of the almanac supported active dialogue: published in November, Zadkiel’s could respond to whatever currents of scientific debate stirred at the BAAS meetings in late summer or early autumn.

The almanac dedicated itself particularly to meteorology. Zadkiel quickly became a by-word for weather prediction, to the point where by the 1860s and 1870s the officials at the Meteorological Office (founded 1854) were known popularly as the government Zadkiel.13 As a Punch satire of 1879 pointed out, Zadkiel made the same kind of prophecies as ‘them voorcasts, what a’ calls “Weather Predictions”—but he supplied them for a whole year in advance and for all England at once. ‘Meteorology? Yea! What’s that to the Voices o’ the Stars?’ 14 While Zadkiel’s thrived, it was impossible for the government office for meteorology to develop its scientific claims and its own cautious efforts at prediction based on telegraphic data collection without constant challenge.

It is crucial to recognize the significance of meteorology to both supporters and critics of astrology. Knight used the presence of weather predictions as the defining symptom of vulgar irrationality. The first pages of explanatory remarks in Knight’s British Almanac tackled the ‘injurious’ and ‘absurd’ practice of weather prediction and denounced the ‘cunning cheats’ who made their living from the foolish human desire for certainty. Assisted by high-ranking men of science, Knight replaced weather prophecy with careful statistical discussion of average weather observations.15 Conversely, Zadkiel deliberately linked his weather notes to the highest reaches of astrological theory, telling his readers in 1832 that weather forecasting epitomized the challenge and promise of mundane astrology, the interpretation of events on a national scale. This was simultaneously the most difficult branch of astrology (according to Zadkiel), the most dubious and ridiculous (according to critics), and the most popular (according to descriptions of

Fig. 8.2. The cover from Zadkiel’s Almanac for 1859 showing the combination of astrological, meteorological, and useful information that was Zadkiel’s trademark. (Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.)
readers rushing to gape at Moore's prophecies). Metropolitan, then, attracted Zadkiel as a way of introducing the merits of astrology in general. He was a sceptical judge of elite science, arguing in 1852 that meteorological work had a responsibility to 'the hard earned labour of British industry' to apply its knowledge to the advantage of the people, which meant pursuing forecasts rather than accumulating statistics. When, in 1867, on the advice of the Royal Society, the Meteorological Office suspended its forecasting, Zadkiel expressed outrage. He denounced the 'helpless old ladies, who figure away' and called for a renewed commitment to weather prediction. Both astrology and weather prediction, as he saw it, were victims of an exclusive scientific culture. Weather was a key to the public interest in almanacs, but it was also a resource that clearly delineated Zadkiel's ideological position.

One of the most striking illustrations of the attraction of meteorology dates from just after the repeal of the Stamp Acts, when a weather almanac became the sensation of the day. Throughout the 1830s, an obscure philosopher Patrick Murphy published a theory of planetary influence on the atmosphere via a combination of electrical, magnetic, and gravitational effects. Several weighty volumes sank without a trace. At the end of 1837 Murphy publicized his work in a short almanac priced at 1s. 6d., which contained an outline of his theories and detailed predictions for 1838, including a prediction that the coldest day of the year would fall on 20 January. When this prediction was confirmed by extreme cold, his printers were swamped with demands for copies. Thirty-three editions were issued within a fortnight. One disgusted critic writing to the secretary of the London Meteorological Society estimated profits at £8000–10,000. Satires and imitators popped up everywhere. Cruikshank's Almanack published a barometer of gullibility marked in pounds rather than inches of pressure (Fig. 8.3). Thomas Hood's Comic Annual related that news of 'a profiting Prophet below' had compelled the Man in the Moon to visit earth (by balloon) with copies of his own lunar theories of the weather, dedicated to Sir John Herschel 'now at the full in celestial fame'. Murphy's coup revealed what was at stake in the almanac trade: a disciplined communication of natural knowledge. Without it, even the most exalted scientific leaders like Herschel could be ridiculed in front of a vast, impressionable audience.

The Illustrated London Almanack: Picturesque Knowledge

The respectable elements of that audience, ready to be schooled in a proper appreciation of natural knowledge, became the target of another remarkable almanac during the middle decades of the century. The Illustrated London Almanack (ILA) was produced by the Illustrated London News from the end of the first season of that weekly's operation in 1845. The ILA was larger than most almanacs, a folio of eight by eleven inches, but it was a typical length of sixty-four pages, and sold for 1s., a fairly moderate price. After 1858, when George Cargill Leighton took over as printer and publisher for the Illustrated London News, the almanac was increasingly elaborately illustrated, with stunning colour engravings
on the covers (Fig. 8.4). Its contents (including tables of cab fares in London, a
description of how to write a will, and lists of popular excursions) suggested an
urban, domestic audience. The most striking feature of the ILA, however, was its
scientific content. From its inception it contained extensive sections on natural
history and astronomy, and scientific notes became increasingly central to its
identity. In the first two decades we can trace a visible decision to concentrate on
scientific content of a particular sort. These modifications show a publisher honing
the direction of his work with the intent of establishing through science a product
that was simultaneously useful, moral, popular, and visually innovative.21

The first issue of the ILA in 1845 was scattershot, addressing history, folklore,
scientific subjects, sports and leisure, domestic matters, and statistics. Each annual
issue consisted of a two-page spread per calendar month (the first twenty-four
pages) followed by about forty pages of articles, interspersed with densely packed
pages of information and tables. Scientific material was prominent. Each of the
monthly openings had a calendar on the verso and natural history notes on the
facing recto side. Two long articles on astronomical subjects followed the
calendars: first, a detailed account of the time ball at the Royal Observatory,
Greenwich; and secondly, an article on ‘New Comets’, with special focus on the
discovery of Neptune the previous year. In this first issue there was a weather table
and a poem on weather signs in folklore—as we have seen, familiar fare for
almanacs. The meteorological content of the ILA, however, trod a middle path,
endorsing neither the prognostication of the popular almanacs, nor the rational
tone of the British Almanac, with its meteorological averages and columns of
observations. The poem on weather signs detailed all the traditional rules for
predictions for the following year. It described how to anticipate the season’s
weather from certain saints’ days even while it ended by exhorting the reader: ‘Let
no such vulgar tales debase thy mind, | Nor [St] Paul, nor [St] Swithin rule the
clouds and wind!’ The 1845 weather table gave a similarly equivocal message. Its
conclusions, as the accompanying text noted, derived from ‘many years’ actual
observation’ and the text acknowledged with due philosophic caution a (rather
ample) room for error in that ‘the weather […] is more uncertain in the latter part
of the Autumn, the whole of Winter and the beginning of Spring.’ At the same
time the table listed predictions based on ideas about lunar influence that linked it to
popular folklore and astrology rather than modern rational meteorology.22 Like the
broad array of topics in the rest of the first issue the meteorological coverage aimed
to please all tastes.

In the following year, however, a much more focused strategy emerged.
Meteorological discussions disappeared (a noteworthy absence for an almanac) and
the format was changed to put its sound sister science, astronomy, front and centre.
The monthly pages now numbered four, with a calendar page, a page on how to
observe the stars and planets, a page of seasonal notes, and finally the natural
history notes. Over the next two or three years the notes on observation became
more detailed and the calendar more elaborate, with historical notes, anniversaries,
gardening, or cookery squeezed out in favour of more chronological and scientific
data. There was regular discussion of astronomical discoveries, especially of new
planets and comets. For two years no mention was made of the weather, but in

Fig. 8.4. On the cover of the Illustrated London Almanack for 1860, the
butterflies hover over the zodiac. Genteel natural history removed this
publication a great distance from the crude hieroglyphics of the traditional
almanac. (Reproduced courtesy of the Ruari McLean Collection, Robertson
Davies Library, Massey College.)
1848 an article on weather observations reappeared. It was significantly different from the offerings of 1845. In 1848 the ILA emphasized the rigorous scientific character of its weather observations. These were based on ‘averages as calculated from the observations taken at the Royal Observatory at Greenwich every two hours, night and day, for four years’. The meteorological notes would avoid predictions and speak only of ‘the general character’ in a month by month description. Despite this disciplined re-introduction, meteorology remained in distant second place to astronomy. The next extensive reference occurred three years later in 1851, when the almanac called attention to the formation of the British Meteorological Society, a society designed to purge meteorological investigations of any popular or astrological tendencies.23

We can surmise what, or rather who, was behind these significant editorial changes. From the second year of its existence, the ILA’s astronomical and occasional meteorological notes were produced by James Glaisher, who was in charge of the recently established magnetic and meteorological department at the Royal Observatory. Making use of Glaisher, the ILA increasingly emphasized its scientific content as its leading feature. Throughout the 1850s the gardening and natural history notes, written by the well-known Jane Loudon, were metaphorically as well as literally second to the billing and placement of the astronomy notes. Glaisher, as the preface in 1854 noted, had care of the almanac’s ‘vital parts’. The almanac increasingly identified itself as an astronomical reference tool for the amateur. It described how to construct an inexpensive telescope, and gave monthly viewing charts. It emphasized the contributions of the ‘private observatories’ that had sprung up in the 1830s and 1840s, and the developments in optical science that were making a new age in astronomy. By the end of the 1850s the ILA presented colour engravings of astronomical photographs in ways that rivalled the much more obviously ‘picturesque’ colour engravings of flowers, birds, or fish.

While a more detailed analysis of the content of the ILA and of Glaisher’s role would be rewarding, space allows consideration of only two points. The first is the visual interest of the ILA. Its ‘picturesque’ qualities were at the core of its identity, and naturally so, considering its parent publication was the principal illustrated weekly of the era. The illustrations offer examples of experimentation with visual records in science in the important context of the illustrated newspaper, in which artistic contributions were acknowledged to be essential to the finished literary product. As colour printing techniques developed, the front covers became visual tours de force, while inside there were more sumptuous natural history prints, engravings of astronomical photographs, and unusual graphs and ways of presenting the calendar. All merit attention. Most significantly the visual aspects of the ILA suggest an explicit parallel with the hieroglyphics of the prophetic almanacs. Here were offerings designed for ‘that part of the public’ which was ‘more open to receive information from pictorial representation than from tabulated numbers’. The engravings then represented a conscious effort at ‘responsible popularit’ in much the same way that the Illustrated London News converted a disreputable format—the illustrated weekly—to respectable middle-class reading.24 The cover of 1860 is a marvellous example, as it transforms the zodiac—hitherto avoided—into a window on the natural world (Fig. 8.4). The zodiacal signs, whimsically cushioned in chrysalides, merely frame the light flooding in from an exterior sky and the insect life swarming on the page. The potentially alarming associations of the zodiac have been displaced by the beauty and variety of the natural world. Nature has taken over the almanac—literally settling down on the title. Such examples indicate the careful design of the almanac, its idea of audience, and its integration of scientific work with both.

The second point relates specifically to the coverage of astronomy. Glaisher was one of the chief figures in British meteorology by virtue of his position at Greenwich and his other activities for the Registrar-General and the new British Meteorological Society. Elsewhere he involved himself in weather prediction, producing harvest forecasts for the Daily News in 1846. Why, then, did he distinctly avoid meteorology in favour of astronomy in the ILA? It seems clear that astronomy offered a resolution to the scientific predication of the almanac—its ephemerality and the question of inaccurate or fraudulent predictions. How could a publication that was regularly rendered both obsolete and false become a suitable forum for scientific knowledge? The ILA addressed the difficulty in two ways. First, it argued that, since all fields of knowledge were now developing very quickly, almanacs were no more ephemeral than any other ‘repository of fact’. By implication, this placed the almanac on an even footing with the most learned productions of the culture. Secondly, in its incorporation of astronomy the ILA was able to break with the notion of the error-ridden almanac: the reader had certainties, and ‘the predictions of one year [we]re now founded on so secure a foundation that they bec[a]me the facts of another’.25 Ephemeralism was replaced by perpetual reference, instruction, and entertainment in a rapidly changing age. Through astronomy, one of the most insubstantial of publications was transformed into a solid, enduring work.

Conclusion

Zadkiel’s Almanac and the ILA share some important features that are worth highlighting. Both belonged to the vast array of new almanacs appearing in this period, rather than to the list of the Stationers’ Company stalwarts. They show how the market changed and opened, while both at the same time evincing continuity with the traditional almanacs. That potent reputation for superstition required constant negotiation, both in Zadkiel’s ‘modern’ science of astrology, and the ILA’s genteel astronomy. The long run of Zadkiel’s over several decades exemplifies the best feature of periodicals as sources for historians: they have the quality of conversations. Their urban atmosphere, however, and at least for the ILA, prosperous middle-class audience, suggest how important it is to move beyond the notion of almanacs as ‘low’ reading, a view propagated by reformers and critics who targeted the almanac as part of ideological debates in the 1830s. Almanacs indicate how definitions of popular literature, popular science, and their relationship to other elements of a rapidly evolving print culture, need to be pursued with more caution and sophistication.

It may be worthwhile to speculate here on the reasons for the comparative
scholarly neglect of the almanac. In the first place, the almanac seems to epitomize the challenge of using periodical literature: we have a flood of material, rather than a trickle. It is hard to develop familiarity with publishing, with genres, and with social categories of readers and editors requisite judiciously to manage that flood. Added to this, almanacs have been more ephemeral than some other kinds of periodicals—sheet almanacs especially, but book almanacs, too, were easily discarded objects. Long runs are rare. Finally, the long tradition of almanacs suggests a third reason for their neglect in the nineteenth century. We continue to view them as remnants (in form and content) of earlier ages—as tenacious, static publications of little modern relevance. Almanacs, then, seem to focus on the past and the future. Yet they were also deeply engaged with debates in the present. As established sources of information about the natural world, and as the reading matter of the millions, almanacs represented the profitable path to popular knowledge.

Notes

3 Perkins, 14.
5 Ibid., 403.
6 Perkins, 238.
9 *Athenaeum*, 16 December 1848, p. 1263.
11 Its original title was *The Herald of Astrology*; it switched to the enduring title in 1832.
13 Curry, 64.
14 *The Times*, 17 January 1883, p. 7.
15 ‘Natural History of the Weather’, *Companion to the Almanac* 1 (1828), 4; 3 (1830), 3 and 68; Knight, II, 62, 123, 126, 129 and 179.
16 *Herald of Astrology* for 1832, 40.
17 Zadkiel’s *Almanac* for 1832, 61–64.
18 Zadkiel’s *Almanac* for 1868, 74; Zadkiel’s *Almanac* for 1869, 72–74.