

THE 4TH EDITION OF

ALCOHOLICS
ANONYMOUS

The Story of
How More Than One Hundred Men
Have Recovered from
Alcoholism

This book contains a complete reprint
of the 1st edition 1939

No Copyright
1999

No rights reserved.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
.	Foreword	vii
.	The Doctor's Opinion	1
. I.	Bill's Story	10
. II.	There Is A Solution	27
. III.	More About Alcoholism	41
. IV.	We Agnostics	56
. V.	How It Works	70
. VI.	Into Action	84
. VII.	Working With Others	101
. VIII.	To Wives	117
. IX.	The Family Afterward	135
. X.	To Employers	150
. XI.	A Vision For You	165
	The Doctor's Nightmare	183
	The Unbeliever	194
	The European Drinker	206
	A Feminine Victory	217
	Our Southern Friend	226
	A Business Man's Recovery	242
	A Different Slant	252
	Traveler, Editor, Scholar	254
	The Back-Slider	265
	Home Brewmeister	274
	The Seventh Month Slip	282
	My Wife And I	287
	A Ward Of The Probate Court	296
	Riding The Rods	303
	The Salesman	317
	Fired Again	325
	The Fearful One	332
	Truth Freed Me!	336
	Smile with Me, At Me	340
	A Close Shave	348
	Educated Agnostic	351
	Another Prodigal Story	357
	The Car Smasher	364
	Hindsight	370
	On His Way	375
	An Alcoholic's Wife	378
	An Artist's Concept	380
	The Rolling Stone	386
	Lone Endeavor	391
	Ace Full Seven-Eleven	399

WE, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics **PRECISELY HOW WE HAVE RECOVERED** is the main purpose of this book. For them, we hope these pages will prove so convincing that no further authentication will be necessary. We think this account of our experiences will help everyone to better understand the alcoholic. Many do not comprehend that the alcoholic is a very sick person. And besides, we are sure that our way of living has its advantages for all.

It is important that we remain anonymous because we are too few, at present, to handle the overwhelming number of personal appeals which may result from this publication. Being mostly business or professional folk we could not well carry on our occupations in such an event. We would like it understood that our alcoholic work is an avocation.

When writing or speaking publicly about alcoholism, we urge each of our Fellowship to omit his personal name, designating himself instead as "A member of Alcoholics Anonymous."

Very earnestly we ask the press also, to observe this request, for otherwise we shall be greatly handicapped.

We are not an organization in the conventional sense of the word. There are no fees nor dues whatsoever. The only requirement for membership is an honest desire to stop drinking. We are not allied with any particular faith, sect or denomination, nor do we oppose anyone. We simply wish to be helpful to those who are afflicted.

We shall be interested to hear from those who are getting results from this book, particularly from those who have commenced work with other alcoholics. We should like to be helpful to such cases.

Inquiry by scientific, medical, and religious societies will be welcomed. (AA BBSG, P.O. Box 31, Washingtonville, 10992-0031 NY)

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS BIG BOOK STUDY GROUP

Note: The First Edition, First Printing, April 1939, has 396 numbered pages. To save cost, we have reduced the printing space but kept the original paragraphing and page numbering. Though it may look unusual, this convention allows us to maintain an exact reproduction of the original text. Thank you for your understanding.

THE DOCTOR'S OPINION

WE OF Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the reader will be interested in the medical estimate of the plan of recovery described in this book. Convincing testimony must surely come from medical men who have had experience with the sufferings of our members and have witnessed our return to health. A well known doctor, chief physician at a nationally prominent hospital specializing in alcoholic and drug addiction, gave Alcoholics Anonymous this letter:

To Whom It May Concern:

I have specialized in the treatment of alcoholism for many years.

About four years ago I attended a patient who, though he had been a competent business man of good earning capacity, was an alcoholic of a type I had come to regard as hopeless.

In the course of his third treatment he acquired certain ideas concerning a possible means of recovery. As part of his rehabilitation he commenced to present his conceptions to other alcoholics, impressing upon them that they must do likewise with still others. This has become the basis of a rapidly growing fellowship of these men and their families. This man and over one hundred others appear to have recovered.

I personally know thirty of these cases who were of the type with whom other methods had failed completely.

2 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

These facts appear to be of extreme medical importance; because of the extraordinary possibilities of rapid growth inherent in this group they may mark a new epoch in the annals of alcoholism. These men may well have a remedy for thousands of such situations.

You may rely absolutely on anything they say about themselves.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) - - - - M.D.

The physician who, at our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture must believe that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind. It did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality, or were outright mental defectives. These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, any picture of the alcoholic which leaves out this physical factor is incomplete.

The doctor's theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinion as to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-alcoholics, we can say that his explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account.

Though we work out our solution on the spiritual as well as an altruistic plane, we favor hospitalization for

THE DOCTOR'S OPINION 3

the alcoholic who is very jittery or befogged. More often than not, it is imperative that a man's brain be cleared before he is approached, as he has then a better chance of understanding and accepting what we have to offer.

The doctor writes:

The subject presented in this book seems to me to be of paramount importance to those afflicted with alcoholic addiction.

I say this after many years' experience as Medical Director of one of the oldest hospitals in the country treating alcoholic and drug addiction.

There was, therefore, a sense of real satisfaction when I was asked to contribute a few words on a subject which is covered in such masterly detail in these pages.

We doctors have realized for a long time that some form of moral psychology was of urgent importance to alcoholics, but its application presented difficulties beyond our conception. What with our ultra-modern standards, our scientific approach to everything, we are perhaps not well equipped to apply the powers of good that lie outside our synthetic knowledge.

About four years ago one of the leading contributors to this book came under our care in this hospital and while here he acquired some ideas which he put into practical application at once.

Later, he requested the privilege of being allowed to tell his story to other patients here and with some misgiving, we consented. The cases we have followed through have been most interesting; in fact, many of them are amazing. The unselfishness of these men

4 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

as we have come to know them, the entire absence of profit motive, and their community spirit, is indeed inspiring to one who has labored long and wearily in this alcoholic field. They believe in themselves, and still more in the Power which pulls chronic alcoholics back from the gates of death.

Of course an alcoholic ought to be freed from his physical craving for liquor, and this often requires a definite hospital procedure, before psychological measures can be of maximum benefit.

We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all; and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their selfconfidence, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve. Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices. The message which can interest and hold these alcoholic people must have depth and weight. In nearly all cases, their ideals must be grounded in a power greater than themselves, if they are to recreate their lives.

If any feel that as psychiatrists directing a hospital for alcoholics we appear somewhat sentimental, let them stand with us a while on the firing line, see the tragedies, the despairing wives, the little children; let the solving of these problems become a part of their daily work, and even of their sleeping moments, and the most cyni-

THE DOCTOR'S OPINION 5

cal will not wonder that we have accepted and encouraged this movement. We feel, after many years of experience, that we have found nothing which has contributed more to the rehabilitation of these men than the altruistic movement now growing up among them.

Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks—drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery.

On the other hand—and strange as this may seem to those who do not understand—once a psychic change has occurred, the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for alcohol, the only effort necessary being that required to follow a few simple rules.

Men have cried out to me in sincere and despairing appeal: "Doctor, I cannot go on like this! I have ev-

6 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

everything to live for! I must stop, but I cannot! You must help me!"

Faced with this problem, if a doctor is honest with himself, he must sometimes feel his own inadequacy. Although he gives all that is in him, it often is not enough. One feels that something more than human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change. Though the aggregate of recoveries resulting from psychiatric effort is considerable, we physicians must admit we have made little impression upon the problem as a whole. Many types do not respond to the ordinary psychological approach.

I do not hold with those who believe that alcoholism is entirely a problem of mental control. I have had many men who had, for example, worked a period of months on some problem or business deal which was to be settled on a certain date, favorably to them. They took a drink a day or so prior to the date, and then the phenomenon of craving at once became paramount to all other interests so that the important appointment was not met. These men were not drinking to escape; they were drinking to overcome a craving beyond their mental control.

There are many situations which arise out of the phenomenon of craving which cause men to make the supreme sacrifice rather than continue to fight.

The classification of alcoholics seems most difficult, and in much detail is outside the scope of this book. There are, of course, the psychopaths who are emotionally unstable. We are all familiar with this type. They are always "going on the wagon for keeps."

They are over-remorseful and make many resolutions, but never a decision.

There is the type of man who is unwilling to admit that he cannot take a drink. He plans various ways of drinking. He changes his brand or his environment. There is the type who always believes that after being entirely free from alcohol for a period of time he can take a drink without danger. There is the manic-depressive type, who is, perhaps, the least understood by his friends, and about whom a whole chapter could be written.

Then there are types entirely normal in every respect except in the effect alcohol has upon them. They are often able, intelligent, friendly people.

All these, and many others, have one symptom in common: they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving. This phenomenon, as we have suggested, may be the manifestation of an allergy which differentiates these people, and sets them apart as a distinct entity. It has never been, by any treatment with which we are familiar, permanently eradicated. The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence.

This immediately precipitates us into a seething caldron of debate. Much has been written pro and con, but among physicians, the general opinion seems to be that most chronic alcoholics are doomed.

What is the solutions Perhaps I can best answer this by relating an experience of two years ago.

About one year prior to this experience a man was brought in to be treated for chronic alcoholism. He had

8 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

but partially recovered from a gastric hemorrhage and seemed to be a case of pathological mental deterioration. He had lost everything worth while in life and was only living, one might say, to drink. He frankly admitted and believed that for him there was no hope. Following the elimination of alcohol there was found to be no permanent brain injury. He accepted the plan outlined in this book. One year later he called to see me, and I experienced a very strange sensation. I knew the man by name, and partly recognized his features, but there all resemblance ended. From a trembling, despairing, nervous wreck, had emerged a man brimming over with self-reliance and contentment. I talked with him for some time, but was not able to bring myself to feel that I had known him before. To me he was a stranger, and so he left me. More than three years have now passed with no return to alcohol.

When I need a mental uplift, I often think of another case brought in by a physician prominent in New York City. The patient had made his own diagnosis, and deciding his situation hopeless, had hidden in a deserted barn determined to die. He was rescued by a searching party, and, in desperate condition, brought to me. Following his physical rehabilitation, he had a talk with me in which he frankly stated he thought the treatment a waste of effort, unless I could assure him, which no one ever had, that in the future he would have the "will power" to resist the impulse to drink.

His alcoholic problem was so complex, and his depression so great, that we felt his only hope would be

through what we then called "moral psychology," and we doubted if even that would have any effect.

However, he did become "sold" on the ideas contained in this book. He has not had a drink for more than three years. I see him now and then and he is as fine a specimen of manhood as one could wish to meet.

I earnestly advise every alcoholic to read this book through, and though perhaps he came to scoff, he may remain to pray.

Chapter One 10

BILL'S STORY

WAR fever ran high in the New England town to which we new, young officers from Plattsburg were assigned, and we were flattered when the first citizens took us to their homes, making us feel heroic. Here was love, applause, war; moments sublime with intervals hilarious. I was part of life at last, and in the midst of the excitement I discovered liquor. I forgot the strong warnings and the prejudices of my people concerning drink. In time we sailed for "Over There." I was very lonely and again turned to alcohol.

We landed in England. I visited Winchester Cathedral. Much moved, I wandered outside. My attention was caught by a doggerel on an old tombstone:

"Here lies a Hampshire Grenadier
Who caught his death
Drinking cold small beer.

A good soldier is ne'er forgot Whether he dieth by musket
Or by pot."

Ominous warning—which I failed to heed.

Twenty-two, and a veteran of foreign wars, I went home at last. I fancied myself a leader, for had not the men of my battery given me a special token of appreciation? My talent for leadership, I imagined, would

BILL'S STORY 11

place me at the head of vast enterprises which I would manage with utmost assurance.

I took a night law course, and obtained employment as investigator for a surety company. The drive for success was on. I'd prove to the world I was important. My work took me about Wall Street and little by little I became interested in the market. Many people lost money—but some became very rich. Why not I? I studied economics and business as well as law. Potential alcoholic that I was, I nearly failed my law course. At one of the finals I was too drunk to think or write. Though my drinking was not yet continuous, it disturbed my wife. We had long talks when I would still her forebodings by telling her that men of genius conceived their best projects when drunk; that the most majestic constructions of philosophic thought were so derived.

By the time I had completed the course, I knew the law was not for me. The inviting maelstrom of Wall Street had me in its grip. Business and financial leaders were my heroes. Out of this alloy of drink and speculation, I commenced to forge the weapon that one day would turn in its flight like a boomer-

ang and all but cut me to ribbons. Living modestly, my wife and I saved \$1,000. It went into certain securities then cheap and rather unpopular. I rightly imagined that they would some day have a great rise. I failed to persuade my broker friends to send me out looking over factories and managements, but my wife and I decided to go anyway. I had developed a theory that most people lost money in stocks through ignorance of markets. I discovered many more reasons later on.

12 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

We gave up our positions and off we roared on a motorcycle, the sidecar stuffed with tent, blankets, change of clothes, and three huge volumes of a financial reference service. Our friends thought a lunacy commission should be appointed. Perhaps they were right. I had had some success at speculation, so we had a little money, but we once worked on a farm for a month to avoid drawing on our small capital. That was the last honest manual labor on my part for many a day. We covered the whole eastern United States in a year. At the end of it, my reports to Wall Street procured me a position there and the use of a large expense account. The exercise of an option brought in more money, leaving us with a profit of several thousand dollars for that year.

For the next few years fortune threw money and applause my way. I had arrived. My judgment and ideas were followed by many to the tune of paper millions. The great boom of the late twenties was seething and swelling. Drink was taking an important and exhilarating part in my life. There was loud talk in the jazz places uptown. Everyone spent in thousands and chattered in millions. Scoffers could scoff and be damned. I made a host of fair-weather friends.

My drinking assumed more serious proportions, continuing all day and almost every night. The remonstrances of my friends terminated in a row and I became a lone wolf. There were many unhappy scenes in our sumptuous apartment. There had been no real infidelity, for loyalty to my wife, helped at times by extreme drunkenness, kept me out of those scrapes.

BILL'S STORY 13

In 1929 I contracted golf fever. We went at once to the country, my wife to applaud while I started out to overtake Walter Hagen. Liquor caught up with me much faster than I came up behind Walter. I began to be jittery in the morning. Golf permitted drinking every day and every night. It was fun to carom around the exclusive course which had inspired such awe in me as a lad. I acquired the impeccable coat of tan one sees upon the well-to-do. The local banker watched me whirl fat checks in and out of his till with amused skepticism.

Abruptly in October 1929 hell broke loose on the New York stock exchange. After one of those days of inferno, I wobbled from a hotel bar to a brokerage office. It was eight o'clock—five hours after the market closed. The ticker still clattered. I was staring at an inch of the tape which bore the inscription XYZ-32. It had been 52 that morning. I was finished and so were many friends. The papers reported men jumping to death from the towers of High Finance. That disgusted me. I would not jump. I went back to the bar. My friends had dropped several million since ten o'clock—so what? Tomorrow was another day. As I drank, the old fierce determination to win came back.

Next morning I telephoned a friend in Montreal. He had plenty of money left and thought I had better go to Canada. By the following spring we were living in our accustomed style. I felt like Napoleon returning from Elba. No St.

Helena for me! But drinking caught up with me again and my generous friend had to let me go. This time we stayed broke.

14 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

We went to live with my wife's parents. I found a job; then lost it as the result of a brawl with a taxi driver. Mercifully, no one could guess that I was to have no real employment for five years, or hardly draw a sober breath. My wife began to work in a department store, coming home exhausted to find me drunk. I became an unwelcome hanger-on at brokerage places.

Liquor ceased to be a luxury; it became a necessity. "Bathtub" gin, two bottles a day, and often three, got to be routine. Sometimes a small deal would net a few hundred dollars, and I would pay my bills at the bars and delicatessens. This went on endlessly, and I began to waken very early in the morning shaking violently. A tumbler full of gin followed by half a dozen bottles of beer would be required if I were to eat any breakfast. Nevertheless, I still thought I could control the situation, and there were periods of sobriety which renewed my wife's hope.

Gradually things got worse. The house was taken over by the mortgage holder, my mother-in-law died, my wife and father-in-law became ill.

Then I got a promising business opportunity. Stocks were at the low point of 1932, and I had somehow formed a group to buy. I was to share generously in the profits. Then I went on a prodigious bender, and that chance vanished.

I woke up. This had to be stopped. I saw I could not take so much as one drink. I was through forever. Before then, I had written lots of sweet promises, but my wife happily observed that this time I meant business. And so I did.

BILL'S STORY 15

Shortly afterward I came home drunk. There had been no fight. Where had been my high resolve? I simply didn't know. It hadn't even come to mind. Someone had pushed a drink my way, and I had taken it. Was I crazy? I began to wonder, for such an appalling lack of perspective seemed near being just that.

Renewing my resolve, I tried again. Some time passed, and confidence began to be replaced by cock-sureness. I could laugh at the gin mills. Now I had what it takes! One day I walked into a cafe to telephone. In no time I was beating on the bar asking myself how it happened. As the whiskey rose to my head I told myself I would manage better next time, but I might as well get good and drunk then. And I did.

The remorse, horror and hopelessness of the next morning are unforgettable. The courage to do battle was not there. My brain raced uncontrollably and there was a terrible sense of impending calamity. I hardly dared cross the street, lest I collapse and be run down by an early morning truck, for it was scarcely daylight. An all night place supplied me with a dozen glasses of ale. My writhing nerves were stilled at last. A morning paper told me the market had gone to hell again. Well, so had I. The market would recover, but I wouldn't. That was a hard thought. Should I kill myself? No—not now. Then a mental fog settled down. Gin would fix that. So two bottles, and—oblivion.

The mind and body are marvelous mechanisms, for mine endured this agony two more years. Sometimes I stole from my wife's slender purse when the morning

16 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

terror and madness were on me. Again I swayed dizzily before an open window, or the medicine cabinet where there was poison, cursing myself for a weakling. There were fights from city to country and back, as my wife and I sought escape. Then came the night when the physical and mental torture was so hellish I feared I would burst through my window, sash and all. Somehow I managed to drag my mattress to a lower floor, lest I suddenly leap. A doctor came with a heavy sedative. Next day found me drinking both gin and sedative. This combination soon landed me on the rocks. People feared for my sanity. So did I. I could eat little or nothing when drinking, and I was forty pounds under weight. My brother-in-law is a physician, and through his kindness and that of my mother I was placed in a nationally-known hospital for the mental and physical rehabilitation of alcoholics. Under the so-called belladonna treatment my brain cleared. Hydrotherapy and mild exercise helped much. Best of all, I met a kind doctor who explained that though certainly selfish and foolish, I had been seriously ill, bodily and mentally.

It relieved me somewhat to learn that in alcoholics the will is amazingly weakened when it comes to combating liquor, though it often remains strong in other respects. My incredible behavior in the face of a desperate desire to stop was explained. Understanding myself now, I fared forth in high hope. For three or four months the goose hung high. I went to town regularly and even made a little money. Surely this was the answer—self-knowledge.

BILL'S STORY 17

But it was not, for the frightful day came when I drank once more. The curve of my declining moral and bodily health fell off like a ski-jump. After a time I returned to the hospital. This was the finish, the curtain, it seemed to me. My weary and despairing wife was informed that it would all end with heart failure during delirium tremens, or I would develop a wet brain, perhaps within a year. She would soon have to give me over to the undertaker or the asylum.

They did not need to tell me. I knew, and almost welcomed the idea. It was a devastating blow to my pride. I, who had thought so well of myself and my abilities, of my capacity to surmount obstacles, was cornered at last. Now I was to plunge into the dark, joining that endless procession of sots who had gone on before. I thought of my poor wife. There had been much happiness after all. What would I not give to make amends. But that was over now.

No words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self-pity. Quicksand stretched around me in all directions. I had met my match. I had been overwhelmed. Alcohol was my master.

Trembling, I stepped from the hospital a broken man. Fear sobered me for a bit. Then came the insidious insanity of that first drink, and on Armistice Day 1934, I was off again. Everyone became resigned to the certainty that I would have to be shut up somewhere, or would stumble along to a miserable end. How dark it is before the dawn! In reality that was the beginning of my last debauch. I was soon to be catapulted into

18 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

what I like to call the fourth dimension of existence. I was to know happiness, peace, and usefulness, in a way of life that is incredibly more wonderful as time passes.

Near the end of that bleak November, I sat drinking in my kitchen. With a certain satisfaction I reflected there was enough gin concealed about the house to carry me through that night and the next day. My wife was at work. I wondered whether I dared hide a full bottle of gin near the head of our bed. I would need it before daylight.

My musing was interrupted by the telephone. The cheery voice of an old school friend asked if he might come over. He was sober. It was years since I could remember his coming to New York in that condition. I was amazed. Rumor had it that he had been committed for alcoholic insanity. I wondered how he had escaped. Of course he would have dinner, and then I could drink openly with him. Unmindful of his welfare, I thought only of recapturing the spirit of other days. There was that time we had chartered an airplane to complete a jag! His coming was an oasis in this dreary desert of futility. The very thing—an oasis! Drinkers are like that. The door opened and he stood there, fresh-skinned and glowing. There was something about his eyes. He was inexplicably different. What had happened?

I pushed a drink across the table. He refused it. Disappointed but curious, I wondered what had got into the fellow. He wasn't himself.

"Come, what's all this about?" I queried.

BILL'S STORY 19

He looked straight at me. Simply, but smilingly, he said, "I've got religion."

I was aghast. So that was it—last summer an alcoholic crackpot; now, I suspected, a little cracked about religion. He had that starry-eyed look. Yes, the old boy was on fire all right. But bless his heart, let him rant! Besides, my gin would last longer than his preaching.

But he did no ranting. In a matter of fact way he told how two men had appeared in court, persuading the judge to suspend his commitment. They had told of a simple religious idea and a practical program of action. That was two months ago and the result was self evident. It worked!

He had come to pass his experience along to me—if I cared to have it. I was shocked, but interested. Certainly I was interested. I had to be, for I was hopeless.

He talked for hours. Childhood memories rose before me. I could almost hear the sound of the preacher's voice as I sat, on still Sundays, way over there on the hillside; there was that proffered temperance pledge I never signed; my grandfather's good natured contempt of some church folk and their doings; his insistence that the spheres really had their music; but his denial of the preacher's right to tell him how he must listen; his fearlessness as he spoke of these things just before he died; these recollections welled up from the past. They made me swallow hard.

That war-time day in old Winchester Cathedral came back again.

I had always believed in a power greater than myself. I had often pondered these things. I was not an atheist.

20 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Few people really are, for that means blind faith in the strange proposition that this universe originated in a cipher and aimlessly rushes nowhere. My intellectual heroes, the chemists, the astronomers, even the evolutionists, suggested vast laws and forces at work. Despite contrary indications, I had little doubt that a mighty purpose and rhythm underlay all. How could there be so

much of precise and immutable law, and no intelligence? I simply had to believe in a Spirit of the Universe, who knew neither time nor limitation. But that was as far as I had gone.

With ministers, and the world's religions, I parted right there. When they talked of a God personal to me, who was love, superhuman strength and direction, I became irritated and my mind snapped shut against such a theory.

To Christ I conceded the certainty of a great man, not too closely followed by those who claimed Him. His moral teaching—most excellent. For myself, I had adopted those parts which seemed convenient and not too difficult; the rest I disregarded.

The wars which had been fought, the burnings and chicanery that religious dispute had facilitated, made me sick. I honestly doubted whether, on balance, the religions of mankind had done any good. Judging from what I had seen in Europe and since, the power of God in human affairs was negligible, the Brotherhood of Man a grim jest. If there was a Devil, he seemed the Boss Universal, and he certainly had me.

But my friend sat before me, and he made the point-blank declaration that God had done for him what he

BILL'S STORY 21

could not do for himself. His human will had failed. Doctors had pronounced him incurable. Society was about to lock him up. Like myself, he had admitted complete defeat. Then he had, in effect, been raised from the dead, suddenly taken from the scrap heap to a level of life better than the best he had ever known!

Had this power originated in him? Obviously it had not. There had been no more power in him than there was in me at that minute; and this was none at all.

That floored me. It began to look as though religious people were right after all. Here was something at work in a human heart which had done the impossible. My ideas about miracles were drastically revised right then. Never mind the musty past; here sat a miracle directly across the kitchen table. He shouted great tidings.

I saw that my friend was much more than inwardly reorganized. He was on a different footing. His roots grasped a new soil.

Despite the living example of my friend there remained in me the vestiges of my old prejudice. The word God still aroused a certain antipathy. When the thought was expressed that there might be a God personal to me this feeling was intensified. I didn't like the idea. I could go for such conceptions as Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind or Spirit of Nature but I resisted the thought of a Czar of the Heavens however loving His sway might be. I have since talked with scores of men who felt the same way.

My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea.

22 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

He said, "Why don't you choose your own conception of God?" That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last.

It was only a matter of being willing to believe in a power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning. I saw that growth could start from that point. Upon a foundation of complete willingness I might

build what I saw in my friend. Would I have it? Of course I would! Thus was I convinced that God is concerned with us humans when we want Him enough. At long last I saw, I felt, I believed. Scales of pride and prejudice fell from my eyes. A new world came into view.

The real significance of my experience in the Cathedral burst upon me. For a brief moment, I had needed and wanted God. There had been a humble willingness to have Him with me—and He came. But soon the sense of His Presence had been blotted out by worldly clamors, mostly those within myself. And so it had been ever since. How blind I had been.

At the hospital I was separated from alcohol for the last time. Treatment seemed wise, for I showed signs of delirium tremens.

There I humbly offered myself to God, as I then understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself unreservedly under His care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without Him I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my newfound Friend

BILL'S STORY 23

take them away, root and branch. I have not had a drink since.

My school mate visited me, and I fully acquainted him with my problems and deficiencies. We made a list of people I had hurt or toward whom I felt resentment. I expressed my entire willingness to approach these individuals, admitting my wrong. Never was I to be critical of them. I was to right all such matters to the utmost of my ability.

I was to test my thinking by the new God-consciousness within. Common sense would thus become uncommon sense. I was to sit quietly when in doubt, asking only for direction and strength to meet my problems as He would have me. Never was I to pray for myself, except as my requests bore on my usefulness to others. Then only might I expect to receive. But that would be in great measure.

My friend promised when these things were done I would enter upon a new relationship with my Creator; that I would have the elements of a way of living which answered all my problems. Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, honesty and humility to establish and maintain the new order of things, were the essential requirements. Simple, but not easy; a price had to be paid. It meant destruction of self-centeredness. I must turn in all things to the Father of Lights who presides over us all.

These were revolutionary and drastic proposals, but the moment I fully accepted them, the effect was electric. There was a sense of victory, followed by such a peace and serenity as I had never known. There was

24 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

utter confidence. I felt lifted up, as though the great clean wind of a mountain top blew through and through. God comes to most men gradually, but His impact on me was sudden and profound.

For a moment I was alarmed, and called my friend, the doctor, to ask if I were still sane. He listened in wonder as I talked.

Finally he shook his head saying, "Something has happened to you I don't understand. But you had better hang on to it. Anything is better than the way you were." The good doctor now sees many men who have such experiences. He knows they are real.

While I lay in the hospital the thought came that there were thousands of hopeless alcoholics who might be glad to have what had been so freely given me. Perhaps I could help some of them. They in turn might work with others.

My friend had emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs. Particularly was it imperative to work with others as he had worked with me. Faith without works was dead, he said. And how appallingly true for the alcoholic! For if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead. If he did not work, he would surely drink again, and if he drank, he would surely die. Then faith would be dead indeed. With us it is just like that.

My wife and I abandoned ourselves with enthusiasm to the idea of helping other alcoholics to a solution of their problems. It was fortunate, for my old business

BILL'S STORY 25

associates remained skeptical for a year and a half, during which I found little work. I was not too well at the time, and was plagued by waves of self-pity and resentment. This sometimes nearly drove me back to drink. I soon found that when all other measures failed, work with another alcoholic would save the day. Many times I have gone to my old hospital in despair. On talking to a man there, I would be amazingly lifted up and set on my feet. It is a design for living that works in rough going.

We commenced to make many fast friends and a fellowship has grown up among us of which it is a wonderful thing to feel a part. The joy of living we really have, even under pressure and difficulty. I have seen one hundred families set their feet in the path that really goes somewhere; have seen the most impossible domestic situations righted; feuds and bitterness of all sorts wiped out. I have seen men come out of asylums and resume a vital place in the lives of their families and communities. Business and professional men have regained their standing. There is scarcely any form of trouble and misery which has not been overcome among us. In one western city and its environs there are eighty of us and our families. We meet frequently at our different homes, so that newcomers may find the fellowship they seek. At these informal gatherings one may often see from 40 to 80 persons. We are growing in numbers and power.

An alcoholic in his cups is an unlovely creature. Our struggles with them are variously strenuous, comic, and

26 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

tragic. One poor chap committed suicide in my home. He could not, or would not, see our way of life.

There is, however, a vast amount of fun about it all. I suppose some would be shocked at our seeming worldliness and levity. But just underneath there is deadly earnestness. Faith has to work twenty-four hours a day in and through us, or we perish.

Most of us feel we need look no further for Utopia. We have it with us right here and now. Each day my friend's simple talk in our kitchen multiplies itself in a widening circle of peace on earth and good will to men.

THERE IS A SOLUTION

WE, OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, know one hundred men who were once just as hopeless as Bill. All have recovered. They have solved the drink problem.

We are average Americans. All sections of this country and many of its occupations are represented, as well as many political, economic, social, and religious backgrounds. We are people who normally would not mix. But there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful. We are like the passengers of a great liner the moment after rescue from shipwreck when camaraderie, joyousness and democracy pervade the vessel from steerage to Captain's table. Unlike the feelings of the ship's passengers, however, our joy in escape from disaster does not subside as we go our individual ways. The feeling of having shared in a common peril is one element in the powerful cement which binds us. But that in itself would never have held us together as we are now joined.

The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action. This

28 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

is the great news this book carries to those who suffer alcoholism.

An illness of this sort—and we have come to believe it an illness—involves those about us in a way no other human sickness can. If a person has cancer all are sorry for him and no one is angry or hurt. But not so with the alcoholic illness, for with it there goes annihilation of all the things worth while in life. It engulfs all whose lives touch the sufferer's. It brings misunderstanding fierce resentment, financial insecurity, disgusted friends and employers, warped lives of blameless children, sad wives and parents—anyone can increase the list.

We hope this volume will inform and comfort those who are, or who may be affected. They are many.

Highly competent psychiatrists who have dealt with us found it sometimes impossible to persuade an alcoholic to discuss his situation without reserve. Strangely enough, wives, parents and intimate friends usually find us even more unapproachable than do the psychiatrist and the doctor.

But the ex-alcoholic who has found this solution, who is properly armed with facts about himself, can generally win the entire confidence of another alcoholic in a few hours. Until such an understanding is reached, little or nothing can be accomplished.

That the man who is making the approach has had the same difficulty, that he obviously knows what he is talking about, that his whole deportment shouts at the new prospect that he is a man with a real answer, that he has no attitude of holier than thou, nothing whatever

THERE IS A SOLUTION 29

except the sincere desire to be helpful; that there are no fees to pay, no axes to grind, no people to please, no lectures to be endured—these are the conditions

we found most effective. After such an approach many take up their beds and walk again.

None of us makes a sole vocation of this work, nor do we think its effectiveness would be increased if we did. We feel that elimination of our drinking is but a beginning. A much more important demonstration of our principles lies before us in our respective homes, occupations, and affairs. All of us spend much of our spare time in the sort of effort which we are going to describe. A few are fortunate enough to be so situated that they can give nearly all of their time to the work.

If we keep on the way we are going there is little doubt that much good will result, but the surface of the problem would hardly be scratched. Those of us who live in large cities are overcome by the reflection that close by hundreds are dropping into oblivion every day. Many could recover if they had the opportunity we have enjoyed. How then shall we present that which has been so freely given us?

We have concluded to publish an anonymous volume setting forth the problem as we see it. We shall bring to the task our combined experience and knowledge. This should suggest a useful program for anyone concerned with a drinking problem. Of necessity there will have to be discussion of matters medical, psychiatric, social, and religious. We are aware that these matters are, from their very nature, controversial. Nothing would please us so much as to

30 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

write a book which would contain no basis for contention or argument. We shall do our utmost to achieve that ideal. Most of us sense that real tolerance of other people's shortcomings and viewpoints and a respect for their opinions are attitudes which make us more useful to others. Our very lives, as ex-alcoholics, depend upon our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs.

You may already have asked yourself why it is that all of us became so very ill from drinking. Doubtless you are curious to discover how and why, in the face of expert opinion to the contrary, we have recovered from a hopeless condition of mind and body. If you are an alcoholic who wants to get over it, you may already be asking—"What do I have to do?"

It is the purpose of this book to answer such questions specifically. We shall tell you what we have done. Before going into a detailed discussion, it may be well to summarize some points as we see them.

How many times people have said to us: "I can take it or leave it alone. Why can't he?" "Why don't you drink like a gentleman or quit?" "That fellow can't handle his liquor." "Why don't you try beer and wine?" "Lay off the hard stuff." "His will power must be weak." "He could stop if he wanted to." "She's such a sweet girl, I should think he'd stop for her." "The doctor told him that if he ever drank again it would kill him, but there he is all lit up again."

Now these are commonplace observations on drinkers which we hear all the time. Back of them is a world of ignorance and misunderstanding. We see that these

THERE IS A SOLUTION 31

expressions refer to people whose reactions are very different from ours.

Moderate drinkers have little trouble in giving up liquor entirely if they have good reason for it. They can take it or leave it alone.

Then we have a certain type of hard drinker. He may have the habit badly enough to gradually impair him physically and mentally. It may cause him to die a few years before his time. If a sufficiently strong reason—ill health, falling in love, change of environment, or the warning of a doctor—becomes operative, this man can also stop or moderate, although he may find it difficult and troublesome and may even need medical attention.

But what about the real alcoholic? He may start off as a moderate drinker; he may or may not become a continuous hard drinker; but at some stage of his drinking career he begins to lose all control of his liquor consumption, once he starts to drink.

Here is the fellow who has been puzzling you, especially in his lack of control. He does absurd, incredible, tragic things while drinking. He is a real Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He is seldom mildly intoxicated. He is always more or less insanely drunk. His disposition while drinking resembles his normal nature but little. He may be one of the finest fellows in the world. Yet let him drink for a day, and he frequently becomes disgustingly, and even dangerously antisocial. He has a positive genius for getting tight at exactly the wrong moment, particularly when some important decision must be made or engagement kept. He is often per-

32 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

fectly sensible and well balanced concerning everything except liquor, but in that respect is incredibly dishonest and selfish. He often possesses special abilities, skills, and aptitudes, and has a promising career ahead of him. He uses his gifts to build up a bright outlook for his family and himself, then pulls the structure down on his head by a senseless series of sprees. He is the fellow who goes to bed so intoxicated he ought to sleep the clock around. Yet early next morning he searches madly for the bottle he misplaced the night before. If he can afford it, he may have liquor concealed all over his house to be certain no one gets his entire supply away from him to throw down the wastepipe. As matters grow worse, he begins to use a combination of highpowered sedative and liquor to quiet his nerves so he can go to work. Then comes the day when he simply cannot make it and gets drunk all over again. Perhaps he goes to a doctor who gives him morphine or some sedative with which to taper off. Then he begins to appear at hospitals and sanitariums. This is by no means a comprehensive picture of the true alcoholic as our behavior patterns vary. But this description should identify him roughly.

Why does he behave like this? If hundreds of experiences have shown him that one drink means another debacle with all its attendant suffering and humiliation, why is it he takes that one drink? Why can't he stay on the water wagon? What has become of the common sense and will power that he still sometimes displays with respect to other matters?

Perhaps there never will be a full answer to these

THERE IS A SOLUTION 33

questions. Opinions vary considerably as to why the alcoholic reacts differently from normal people. We are not sure why, once a certain point is reached, little can be done for him. We cannot answer the riddle.

We know that while the alcoholic keeps away from drink as he may do for months or years, he reacts much like other men. We are equally positive that once he takes any alcohol whatever into his system, something happens, both

in the bodily and mental sense, which makes it virtually impossible for him to stop. The experience of any alcoholic will abundantly confirm that.

These observations would be academic and pointless if our friend never took the first drink thereby setting the terrible cycle in motion. Therefore, the main problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind, rather than in his body. If you ask him why he started on that last bender, the chances are he will offer you any one of a hundred alibis. Sometimes these excuses have a certain plausibility, but none of them really make sense in the light of the havoc an alcoholic's drinking bout creates. They sound like the philosophy of the man who, having a headache, beat himself on the head with a hammer so that he couldn't feel the ache. If you draw this fallacious reasoning to the attention of an alcoholic, he will laugh it off, or become irritated and refuse to talk. Once in a while he may tell the truth. And the truth, strange to say, is usually that he has no more idea why he took that first drink than you have. Some drinkers have excuses with which they are satisfied part of the time. But in their hearts they really do not know why they do it. Once this malady has a real hold, they are

34 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

a baffled lot. There is the obsession that somehow, some day, they will beat the game. But they often suspect they are down for the count.

How true this is, few realize. In a vague way their families and friends sense that these drinkers are abnormal, but everybody hopefully waits the day when the sufferer will rouse himself from his lethargy and assert his power of will.

The tragic truth is that if the man be a real alcoholic, the happy day will seldom arrive. He has lost control. At a certain point in the drinking of every alcoholic, he passes into a state where the most powerful desire to stop drinking is of absolutely no avail. This tragic situation has already arrived in practically every case long before it is suspected.

The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically non-existent. We are unable at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink.

The almost certain consequences that follow taking even a glass of beer do not crowd into the mind to deter us. If these thoughts occur, they are hazy, and readily supplanted with the old threadbare idea that this time we shall handle ourselves like other people. There is a complete failure of the kind of defense that keeps one from putting his hand on a hot stove.

The alcoholic may say to himself in the most casual way, "It won't burn me this time, so here's how!" Or

THERE IS A SOLUTION 35

perhaps he doesn't think at all. How often have some of us begun to drink in this nonchalant way, and after the third or fourth, pounded on the bar and said to ourselves, "For God's sake, how did I ever get started again?" Only to have that thought supplanted by "Well, I'll stop with the sixth drink." Or "What's the use anyhow?"

When this sort of thinking is fully established in an individual with alcoholic tendencies, he has probably placed himself beyond human aid, and unless locked up, may die, or go permanently insane. These stark and ugly facts have been confirmed by legions of alcoholics throughout history. But for the

grace of God, there would have been one hundred more convincing demonstrations. So many want to stop, but cannot. There is a solution. Almost none of us liked the selfsearching, the leveling of our pride, the confession of shortcomings which the process requires for its successful consummation. But we saw that it really worked in others, and we had come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life as we had been living it. When, therefore, we were approached by those in whom the problem had been solved, there was nothing left for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet. We have found much of heaven and we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence, of which we had not even dreamed.

The great fact is just this, and nothing less: that we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences, which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows, and toward God's universe. The

36 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves.

If you are as seriously alcoholic as we were, we believe there is no middle-of-the-road solution. We were in a position where life was becoming impossible, and if we had passed into the region from which there is no return through human aid, we had but two alternatives: one was to go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation as best we could; and the other, to accept spiritual help. This we did because we honestly wanted to, and were willing to make the effort.

A certain American business man had ability, good sense, and high character. For years he had floundered from one sanitarium to another. He had consulted the best known American psychiatrists. Then he had gone to Europe, placing himself in the care of a celebrated physician who prescribed for him. Though experience had made him skeptical, he finished his treatment with unusual confidence. His physical and mental condition were unusually good. Above all, he believed he had acquired such a profound knowledge of the inner workings of his mind and its hidden springs, that relapse was unthinkable. Nevertheless, he was drunk in a short time. More baffling still, he could give himself no satisfactory explanation for his fall.

So he returned to this doctor, whom he admired, and

THERE IS A SOLUTION 37

asked him point-blank why he could not recover. He wished above all things to regain self-control. He seemed quite rational and well-balanced with respect to other problems. Yet he had no control whatever over alcohol. Why was this?

He begged the doctor to tell him the whole truth, and he got it. In the doctor's judgment he was utterly hopeless; he could never regain his position in society and he would have to place himself under lock and key, or hire a bodyguard if he expected to live long. That was a great physician's opinion.

But this man still lives, and is a free man. He does not need a bodyguard, nor is he confined. He can go anywhere on this earth where other free men may go without disaster, provided he remains willing to maintain a certain simple attitude.

Some of our alcoholic readers may think they can do without spiritual help. Let us tell you the rest of the conversation our friend had with his doctor.

The doctor said: "You have the mind of a chronic alcoholic. I have never seen one single case recover, where that state of mind existed to the extent that it does in you." Our friend felt as though the gates of hell had closed on him with a clang.

He said to the doctor, "Is there no exception?"

"Yes," replied the doctor, "there is. Exceptions to cases such as yours have been occurring since early times. Here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences. To me these occurrences are phenomena. They appear to be

38 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them. In fact, I have been trying to produce some such emotional rearrangement within you. With many individuals the methods which I employed are successful, but I have never been successful with an alcoholic of your description."

Upon hearing this, our friend was somewhat relieved, for he reflected that, after all, he was a good church member. This hope, however, was destroyed by the doctor's telling him that his religious convictions were very good, but that in his case they did not spell the necessary vital spiritual experience.

Here was the terrible dilemma in which our friend found himself when he had the extraordinary experience, which as we have already told you, made him a free man.

We, in our turn, sought the same escape, with all the desperation of drowning men. What seemed at first a flimsy reed, has proved to be the loving and powerful hand of God. A new life has been given us or, if you prefer, "a design for living" that really works.

The distinguished American psychologist, William James, in his book "Varieties of Religious Experience", indicates a multitude of ways in which men have discovered God. We have no desire to convince anyone that there is only one way by which faith can be ac-

THERE IS A SOLUTION 39

quired. If what we have learned, and felt, and seen, means anything at all, it means that all of us, whatever our race, creed, or color, are the children of a living Creator with whom we may form a relationship upon simple and understandable terms as soon as we are willing and honest enough to try. Those having religious affiliations will find here nothing disturbing to their beliefs or ceremonies. There is no friction among us over such matters.

We think it no concern of ours what religious bodies our members identify themselves with as individuals. This should be an entirely personal affair which each one decides for himself in the light of past associations, or his present choice. Not all of us have joined religious bodies, but most of us favor such memberships.

In the following chapter, there appears an explanation of alcoholism as we understand it, then a chapter addressed to the agnostic. Many who once were

in this class are now among our members; surprisingly enough, we find such convictions no great obstacle to a spiritual experience.

Further on clear-cut directions are given showing how we recovered. These are followed by more than a score of personal experiences.

Each individual, in the personal stories, describes in his own language, and from his own point of view the way he established his relationship with God. These give a fair cross section of our membership and a clear-cut idea of what has actually happened in their lives.

We hope no one will consider these self-revealing ac-

40 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

counts in bad taste. Our hope is that many alcoholic men and women, desperately in need, will see these pages, and we believe that it is only by fully disclosing ourselves and our problems that they will be persuaded to say, "Yes, I am one of them too; I must have this thing."

Chapter Three 41

MORE ABOUT ALCOHOLISM

MOST of us have been unwilling to admit we were real alcoholics. No person likes to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his liquor drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death.

We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed.

We alcoholics are men and women who have lost the ability to control our drinking. We know that no real alcoholic ever recovered control. All of us felt at times that we were regaining control, but such intervals—usually brief—were inevitably followed by still less control, which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. We are convinced to a man that alcoholics of our type are in the grip of a progressive illness. Over any considerable period we get worse, never better.

42 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

We are like men who have lost their legs; they never grow new ones. Neither does there appear to be any kind of treatment which will make alcoholics of our kind like other men. We have tried every imaginable remedy. In some instances there has been brief recovery, followed always by still worse relapse. Physicians who are familiar with alcoholism agree there is no such thing as making a normal drinker out of an alcoholic. Science may one day accomplish this, but it evidently hasn't done so yet.

Despite all we can say, many who are real alcoholics are not going to believe they are in that class. By every form of self-deception and experimentation, they will try to prove themselves exceptions to the rule, therefore non-alcoholic. If anyone, who is showing inability to control his drinking, can do the

right-about-face and drink like a gentleman, our hats are off to him. Heaven knows? we have tried hard enough and long enough to drink like other people!

Here are some of the methods we have tried: drinking beer only, limiting the number of drinks, never drinking alone, never drinking in the morning, drinking only at home, never having it in the house, never drinking during business hours, drinking only at parties, switching from scotch to brandy, drinking only natural wines, agreeing to resign if ever drunk on the job, taking a trip, not taking a trip, swearing off forever (with and without a solemn oath), taking more physical exercise, reading inspirational books, going to health farms and sanitariums, accepting voluntary commitment to asylums—we could increase the list ad infinitum.

MORE ABOUT ALCOHOLISM 43

We do not like to brand any individual as an alcoholic, but you can quickly diagnose yourself. Step over to the nearest barroom and try some controlled drinking. Try to drink and stop abruptly. Try it more than once. It will not take long for you to decide, if you are honest with yourself about it. It may be worth a bad case of jitters if you get a full knowledge of your condition.

Though there is no way of proving it, we believe that early in our drinking careers most of us could have stopped drinking. But the difficulty is that few alcoholics have enough desire to stop while there is yet time. We have heard of a few instances where people, who showed definite signs of alcoholism, were able to stop for a long period because of an overpowering desire to do so. Here is one.

A man of thirty was doing a great deal of spree drinking. He was very nervous in the morning after these bouts and quieted himself with more liquor. He was ambitious to succeed in business, but saw that he would get nowhere if he drank at all. Once he started, he had no control whatever. He made up his mind that until he had been successful in business and had retired, he would not touch another drop. An exceptional man, he remained bone dry for twenty-five years, and retired at the age of fifty-five, after a successful and happy business career. Then he fell victim to a belief which practically every alcoholic has—that his long period of sobriety and self-discipline had qualified him to drink as other men. Out came his carpet slippers and a bottle. In two months he was in a hospital, puzzled and humili-

44 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

ated. He tried to regulate his drinking for a while, making several trips to the hospital meantime. Then, gathering all his forces, he attempted to stop altogether and found he could not. Every means of solving his problem which money could buy was at his disposal. Every attempt failed. Though a robust man at retirement, he went to pieces quickly, and was dead within four years.

This case contains a powerful lesson. Most of us have believed that if we remained sober for a long stretch, we could thereafter drink normally. But here is a man who at fifty-five years found he was just where he had left off at thirty. We have seen the truth demonstrated again and again: "once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic." Commencing to drink after a period of sobriety, we are in a short time as bad as ever. If we are planning to stop drinking, there must be no reservation of any kind, nor any lurking notion that someday we will be immune to alcohol.

Young people may be encouraged by this man's experience to think that they can stop, as he did, on their own will power. We doubt if many of them can do it, because none will really want to stop, and hardly one of them, because of the peculiar mental twist already acquired, will find he can win out. Several of our crowd, men of thirty-five or less, had been drinking only a few years, but they found themselves as helpless as those who had been drinking twenty years.

To be gravely affected, one does not necessarily have to drink a long time, nor take the quantities some of us have. This is particularly true of women. Potential

MORE ABOUT ALCOHOLISM 45

feminine alcoholics often turn into the real thing and are gone beyond recall in a few years. Certain drinkers, who would be greatly insulted if called alcoholics, are astonished at their inability to stop. We, who are familiar with the symptoms, see large numbers of potential alcoholics among young people everywhere. But try and get them to see it!

As we look back, we feel we had gone on drinking many years beyond the point where we could quit on our will power. If anyone questions whether he has entered this dangerous area, let him try leaving liquor alone for one year. If he is a real alcoholic and very far advanced, there is scant chance of success. In the early days of our drinking we occasionally remained sober for a year or more, becoming serious drinkers again later. Though you may be able to stop for a considerable period, you may yet be a potential alcoholic. We think few, to whom this book will appeal, can stay dry anything like a year. Some will be drunk the day after making their resolutions; most of them within a few weeks.

For those who are unable to drink moderately the question is how to stop altogether. We are assuming, of course, that the reader desires to stop. Whether such a person can quit upon a non-spiritual basis depends upon the extent to which he has already lost the power to choose whether he will drink or not. Many of us felt that we had plenty of character. There was a tremendous urge to cease forever. Yet we found it impossible. This is the baffling feature of alcoholism as

46 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

we know it—this utter inability to leave it alone, no matter how great the necessity or the wish.

How then shall we help our readers determine, to their own satisfaction, whether they are one of us? The experiment of quitting for a period of time will be helpful, but we think we can render an even greater service to alcoholic sufferers, and perhaps to the medical fraternity. So we shall describe some of the mental states that precede a relapse into drinking, for obviously this is the crux of the problem.

What sort of thinking dominates an alcoholic who repeats time after time the desperate experiment of the first drink? Friends, who have reasoned with him after a spree which has brought him to the point of divorce or bankruptcy, are mystified when he walks directly into a saloon. Why does he? Of what is he thinking?

Our first example is a friend we shall call Jim. This man has a charming wife and family. He inherited a lucrative automobile agency. He had a commendable world war record. He is a good salesman. Everybody likes him. He is an

intelligent man, normal so far as we can see, except for a nervous disposition. He did no drinking until he was thirtyfive. In a few years he became so violent when intoxicated that he had to be committed. On leaving the asylum, he came into contact with us.

We told him what we knew of alcoholism and the answer we had found. He made a beginning. His family was re-assembled, and he began to work as a salesman for the business he had lost through drinking. All went well for a time, but he failed to enlarge his

MORE ABOUT ALCOHOLISM 47

spiritual life. To his consternation, he found himself drunk half a dozen times in rapid succession. On each of these occasions we worked with him, reviewing carefully what had happened. He agreed he was a real alcoholic and in serious condition. He knew he faced another trip to the asylum if he kept on. Moreover, he would lose his family for whom he had deep affection.

Yet he got drunk again. We asked him to tell us exactly how it happened. This is his story: "I came to work on Tuesday morning. I remember I felt irritated that I had to be a salesman for a concern I once owned. I had a few words with the boss, but nothing serious. Then I decided to drive into the country and see one of my prospects for a car. On the way I felt hungry so I stopped at a roadside place where they have a bar. I had no intention of drinking. I just thought I would get a sandwich. I also had the notion that I might find a customer for a car at this place, which was familiar, for I had been going to it for years. I had eaten there many times during the months I was sober. I sat down at a table and ordered a sandwich and a glass of milk. Still no thought of drinking. I ordered another sandwich and decided to have another glass of milk.

"Suddenly the thought crossed my mind that if I were to put an ounce of whiskey in my milk, it couldn't hurt me on a full stomach. I ordered a whiskey and poured it into the milk. I vaguely sensed I was not being any too smart, but felt reassured, as I was taking the whiskey on a full stomach. The experiment went so well that I ordered another whiskey and poured it into more milk. That didn't seem to bother me so I tried another."

48 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Thus started one more journey to the asylum for Jim. Here was the threat of commitment, the loss of family and position, to say nothing of that intense mental and physical suffering which drinking always caused him. He had much knowledge about himself as an alcoholic. Yet all reasons for not drinking were easily pushed aside in favor of the foolish idea he could take whiskey if only he mixed it with milk!

Whatever the precise definition of the word may be, we call this plain insanity. How can such a lack of proportion, of the ability to think straight, be called anything else?

You may think this an extreme case. To us it is not farfetched, for this kind of thinking has been characteristic of every single one of us. We have sometimes reflected more than Jim did upon the consequences. But there was always the curious mental phenomenon, that parallel with our sound reasoning there inevitably ran some insanely trivial excuse for taking the first drink. Our sound reasoning failed to hold us in check. The insane idea won out. Next day we would ask ourselves, in all earnestness and sincerity, how it could have happened.

In some circumstances we have gone out deliberately to get drunk, feeling ourselves justified by nervousness, anger, worry, depression, jealousy or the like. But even in this type of beginning we are obliged to admit that our justification for a spree was insanely insufficient in the light of what always happened. We now see that when we began to drink deliberately, instead of casually, there was little serious or effective thought during

MORE ABOUT ALCOHOLISM 49

the period of premeditation of what the terrific consequences might be.

Our behavior is as absurd and incomprehensible with respect to the first drink as that of an individual with a passion, say, for jay-walking. He gets a thrill out of skipping in front of fast-moving vehicles. He enjoys himself a few years in spite of friendly warnings. Up to this point you would label him as a foolish chap having queer ideas of fun. Luck then deserts him and he is slightly injured several times in succession. You would expect him, if he were normal, to cut it out. Presently he is hit again and this time has a fractured skull. Within a week after leaving the hospital a fast-moving trolley car breaks his arm. He tells you he has decided to stop jay-walking for good, but in a few weeks he breaks both legs.

On through the years this conduct continues, accompanied by his continual promises to be careful or to keep off the streets altogether. Finally, he can no longer work, his wife gets a divorce, he is held up to ridicule. He tries every known means to get the jay-walking idea out of his head. He shuts himself up in an asylum, hoping to mend his ways. But the day he comes out he races in front of a fire engine, which breaks his back. Such a man would be crazy, wouldn't he?

You may think our illustration is too ridiculous. But is it? We, who have been through the wringer, have to admit if we substituted alcoholism for jay-walking, the illustration would fit us exactly. However intelligent we may have been in other respects, where alcohol

50 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

has been involved, we have been strangely insane. It's strong language—but isn't it true?

Some of you are thinking: "Yes, what you tell us is true, but it doesn't fully apply. We admit we have some of these symptoms, but we have not gone to the extremes you fellows did, nor are we likely to, for we understand ourselves so well after what you have told us that such things cannot happen again. We have not lost everything in life through drinking and we certainly do not intend to. Thanks for the information."

That may be true of certain non-alcoholic people who, though drinking foolishly and heavily at the present time, are able to stop or moderate, because their brains and bodies have not been damaged as ours were. But the actual or potential alcoholic, with hardly an exception, will be absolutely unable to stop drinking on the basis of self-knowledge. This is a point we wish to emphasize and re-emphasize, to smash home upon our alcoholic readers as it has been revealed to us out of bitter experience. Let us take another illustration.

Fred is partner in a well known accounting firm. His income is good, he has a fine home, is happily married and the father of promising children of college age. He is so attractive a personality that he makes friends with everyone. If ever there was a successful business man, it is Fred. To all appearance he is a

stable, well balanced individual. Yet, he is alcoholic. We first saw Fred about a year ago in a hospital where he had gone to recover from a bad case of jitters. It was his first experience of this kind, and he was much ashamed of it. Far from admitting he was an alcoholic, he told himself

MORE ABOUT ALCOHOLISM 51

he came to the hospital to rest his nerves. The doctor intimated strongly that he might be worse than he realized. For a few days he was depressed about his condition. He made up his mind to quit drinking altogether. It never occurred to him that perhaps he could not do so, in spite of his character and standing. Fred would not believe himself an alcoholic, much less accept a spiritual remedy for his problem. We told him what we knew about alcoholism. He was interested and conceded that he had some of the symptoms, but he was a long way from admitting that he could do nothing about it himself. He was positive that this humiliating experience, plus the knowledge he had acquired, would keep him sober the rest of his life. Self-knowledge would fix it.

We heard no more of Fred for a while. One day we were told that he was back in the hospital. This time he was quite shaky. He soon indicated he was anxious to see us. The story he told is most instructive for here was a chap absolutely convinced he had to stop drinking, who had no excuse for drinking, who exhibited splendid judgment and determination in all his other concerns, yet was flat on his back nevertheless.

Let him tell you about it: "I was much impressed with what you fellows said about alcoholism, but I frankly did not believe it would be possible for me to drink again. I somewhat appreciated your ideas about the subtle insanity which precedes the first drink, but I was confident it could not happen to me after what I had learned. I reasoned I was not so far advanced as most of you fellows, that I had been usually successful

52 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

in licking my other personal problems, that I would therefore be successful where you men failed. I felt I had every right to be self-confident, that it would be only a matter of exercising my will power and keeping on guard." In this frame of mind, I went about my business and for a time all was well. I had no trouble refusing drinks, and began to wonder if I had not been making too hard work of a simple matter. One day I went to Washington to present some accounting evidence to a government bureau. I had been out of town before during this particular dry spell, so there was nothing new about that. Physically, I felt fine. Neither did I have any pressing problems or worries. My business came off well, I was pleased and knew my partners would be too. It was the end of a perfect day, not a cloud on the horizon.

"I went to my hotel and leisurely dressed for dinner. As I crossed the threshold of the dining room, the thought came to mind it would be nice to have couple of cocktails with dinner. That was all. Nothing more. I ordered a cocktail and my meal. Then I ordered another cocktail. After dinner I decided to take a walk. When I returned to the hotel it struck me a highball would be fine before going to bed, so I stepped into the bar and had one. I remember having several more that night and plenty next morning. I have a shadowy recollection of being in an airplane bound for New York, of finding a friendly taxicab driver at the landing field instead of my wife. The driver escorted me about for several days. I know little of where I went, or what

I said and did. Then came the hospital with unbearable mental and physical suffering.

"As soon as I regained my ability to think, I went carefully over that evening in Washington. Not only had I been off guard, I had made no fight whatever against that first drink. This time I had not thought of the consequences at all. I had commenced to drink as carelessly as though the cocktails were ginger ale. I now remembered what my alcoholic friends had told me, how they prophesied that if I had an alcoholic mind, the time and place would come—I would drink again. They had said that though I did raise a defense, it would one day give way before some trivial reason for having a drink. Well, just that did happen and more, for what I had learned of alcoholism did not occur to me at all. I knew from that moment that I had an alcoholic mind. I saw that will power and self-knowledge would not help in those strange mental blank spots. I had never been able to understand people who said that a problem had them hopelessly defeated. I knew then. It was a crushing blow." "Two of the members of Alcoholics Anonymous came to see me. They grinned, which I didn't like so much, and then asked me if I thought myself alcoholic and if I were really licked this time. I had to concede both propositions. They piled on me heaps of evidence to the effect that an alcoholic mentality, such as I had exhibited in Washington, was a hopeless condition. They cited cases out of their own experience by the dozen. This process snuffed out the last flicker of conviction that I could do the job myself.

54 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

"Then they outlined the spiritual answer and program of action which a hundred of them had followed successfully. Though I had been only a nominal churchman, their proposals were not, intellectually, hard to swallow. But the program of action, though entirely sensible, was pretty drastic. It meant I would have to throw several lifelong conceptions out of the window. That was not easy. But the moment I made up my mind to go through with the process, I had the curious feeling that my alcoholic condition was relieved, as in fact it proved to be.

"Quite as important was the discovery that spiritual principles would solve all my problems. I have since been brought into a way of living infinitely more satisfying and, I hope, more useful than the life I lived before. My old manner of life was by no means a bad one, but I would not exchange its best moments for the worst I have now. I would not go back to it even if I could."

Fred's story speaks for itself. We hope it strikes home to thousands like him. He had felt only the first nip of the wringer. Most alcoholics have to be pretty badly mangled before they really commence to solve their problems.

Many doctors and psychiatrists agree with our conclusions. One of these men, staff member of a world-renowned hospital, recently made this statement to some of us: "What you say about the general hopelessness of the average alcoholic's plight is, in my opinion, correct. As to two of you men, whose stories I have heard, there is no doubt in my mind that you were

MORE ABOUT ALCOHOLISM 55

100% hopeless, apart from Divine help. Had you offered yourselves as patients at this hospital, I would not have taken you, if I had been able to avoid it. People like you are too heartbreaking. Though not a religious person, I have

profound respect for the spiritual approach in such cases as yours. For most cases, there is virtually no other solution.“

Once more: the alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink. Except in a few rare cases, neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defense. His defense must come from a higher Power.

Chapter Four 56

WE AGNOSTICS

IN THE preceding chapters, you have learned something of alcoholism. We hope we have made clear the distinction between the alcoholic and the non-alcoholic. If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if, when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic. If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer.

To one who feels he is an atheist or agnostic such an experience seems impossible, but to continue as he is means disaster especially if he is an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on a spiritual basis—not always easy alternatives to face.

But it isn't so difficult. About half our fellowship were of exactly that type. At first some of us tried to avoid the issue, hoping against hope we were not true alcoholics. But after a while we had to face the fact that we must find a spiritual basis of life—or else. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you. But cheer up, something like fifty of us thought we were atheists or agnostics. Our experience shows that you need not be disconcerted.

WE AGNOSTICS 57

If a mere code of morals, or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of us would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no matter how much we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could will these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn't there. Our human resources, as marshalled by the will, were not sufficient; they failed utterly.

Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be A Power Greater Than Ourselves. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this Power?

Well, that's exactly what this book is about. Its main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself, which will solve your problem. That means we have written a book which we believe to be spiritual as well as moral. And it means, of course, that we are going to talk about God. Here difficulty arises with agnostics. Many times we talk to a new man and watch his hope rise as we discuss his alcoholic problems and explain our fellowship. But his face falls when we speak of spiritual matters, especially when we mention God, for we have re-opened a subject which our man thought he had neatly evaded or entirely ignored. We know how he feels. We have shared his honest doubt and prejudice. Some of us have been violently anti-religious. To others, the word "God" brought up a particular idea of Him with which someone had tried to impress them during childhood. Perhaps we rejected

this particular conception because it seemed inadequate. With that rejection we imagined we had abandoned the God idea entirely. We were bothered with the thought that faith and dependence upon a Power beyond ourselves was somewhat weak, even cowardly. We looked upon this world of warring individuals, warring theological systems, and inexplicable calamity, with deep skepticism. We looked askance at many individuals who claimed to be godly. How could a Supreme Being have anything to do with it all? And who could comprehend a Supreme Being anyhow? Yet, in other moments, we found ourselves thinking, when enchanted by a starlit night, "Who, then, made all this?" There was a feeling of awe and wonder, but it was fleeting and soon lost.

Yes, we of agnostic temperament have had these thoughts and experiences. Let us make haste to reassure you. We found that as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power, which is God.

Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him. As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, A Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, provided we took other simple

WE AGNOSTICS 59

steps. We found that God does not make too hard terms with those who seek Him. To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding, to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all men.

When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean your own conception of God. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions which you find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. At the start, this is all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to effect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him. Afterward, we found ourselves accepting many things which then seemed entirely out of reach. That is growth, but if we wished to grow, we had to begin somewhere. So we used our own conception, however limited it was.

We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. "Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?" As soon as a man can say that he does believe, or is willing to believe, we emphatically assure him that he is on his way. It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built. That was great news to us, for we had assumed we could not make use of spiritual principles unless we accepted many things on faith which seemed difficult to believe. When people presented us with spiritual approaches, how frequently did we all say: "I wish I had what that man has. I'm sure it would work if I could

60 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

only believe as he believes. But I cannot accept as surely true the many articles of faith which are so plain to him." So it was comforting to learn that we could commence at a simpler level.

Besides a seeming inability to accept much on faith, we often found ourselves handicapped by obstinacy, sensitiveness, and unreasoning prejudice. Many of us have been so touchy that even casual reference to spiritual things made us bristle with antagonism. This sort of thinking had to be abandoned. Though some of us resisted, we found no great difficulty in casting aside such feelings. Faced with alcoholic destruction, we soon became as open minded on spiritual matters as we had tried to be on other questions. In this respect alcohol was a great persuader. It finally beat us into a state of reasonableness. Sometimes this was a tedious process; we hope no one will be prejudiced as long as some of us were.

The reader may still ask why he should believe in a Power greater than himself. We think there are good reasons. Let us have a look at some of them.

The practical individual of today is a stickler for facts and results. Nevertheless, the twentieth century readily accepts theories of all kinds, provided they are firmly grounded in fact. We have numerous theories, for example, about electricity. Everybody believes them without a murmur of doubt. Why this ready acceptance? Simply because it is impossible to explain what we see, feel, direct, and use, without a reasonable assumption as a starting point. Everybody nowadays, believes in scores of assump-

WE AGNOSTICS 61

tions for which there is good evidence, but no perfect visual proof. And does not science demonstrate that visual proof is the weakest proof? It is being constantly revealed, as mankind studies the material world, that outward appearances are not inward reality at all. To illustrate: The prosaic steel girder is a mass of electrons whirling around each other at incredible speed. These tiny bodies are governed by precise laws, and these laws hold true throughout the material world. Science tells us so. We have no reason to doubt it. When, however, the perfectly logical assumption is suggested that underneath the material world and life as we see it, there is an All Powerful, Guiding, Creative Intelligence, right there our perverse streak comes to the surface and we laboriously set out to convince ourselves it isn't so. We read wordy books and indulge in windy arguments, thinking we believe this universe needs no God to explain it. Were our contentions true, it would follow that life originated out of nothing, means nothing, and proceeds nowhere.

Instead of regarding ourselves as intelligent agents, spearheads of God's ever advancing Creation, we agnostics and atheists chose to believe that our human intelligence was the last word, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and end of all. Rather vain of us, wasn't it?

We, who have traveled this dubious path, beg you to lay aside prejudice, even against organized religion. We have learned that whatever the human frailties of various faiths may be, those faiths have given purpose and direction to millions. People of faith have a logical idea

62 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

of what life is all about. Actually, we used to have no reasonable conception whatever. We used to amuse ourselves by cynically dissecting spiritual beliefs and practices when we might have observed that many spiritually-minded persons of all races, colors, and creeds were demonstrating a degree of stability, happiness and usefulness which we should have sought ourselves.

Instead, we looked at the human defects of these people, and sometimes used their shortcomings as a basis of wholesale condemnation. We talked of intolerance, while we were intolerant ourselves. We missed the reality and the beauty of the forest because we were diverted by the ugliness of some of its trees. We never gave the spiritual side of life a fair hearing.

In our personal stories you will find wide variation in the way each teller approaches and conceives of the Power which is greater than himself. Whether we agree with a particular approach or conception seems to make little difference. Experience has taught that these are matters about which, for our purpose, we need not be worried. They are questions for each individual to settle for himself.

On one proposition, however, these men and women are strikingly agreed. Everyone of them has gained access to, and believes in, a Power greater than himself. This Power has in each case accomplished the miraculous, the humanly impossible. As a celebrated American statesman puts it, "Let's look at the record."

Here are one hundred men and women, worldly indeed. They flatly declare that since they have come to believe in a Power greater than themselves, to take a cer-

WE AGNOSTICS 63

tain attitude toward that Power, and to do certain simple things, there has been a revolutionary change in their way of living and thinking. In the face of collapse and despair, in the face of the total failure of their human resources, they found that a new Power, peace, happiness, and sense of direction flowed into them. This happened soon after they whole-heartedly met a few simple requirements. Once confused and baffled by the seeming futility of existence, they will show the underlying reasons why they were making heavy going of life. Leaving aside the drink question, they tell why living was so unsatisfactory. They will show how the change came over them. When one hundred people, are able to say that the consciousness of The Presence of God is today the most important fact of their lives, they present a powerful reason why one should have faith.

This world of ours has made more material progress in the last century than in all the milleniums which went before. Almost everyone knows the reason. Students of ancient history tell us that the intellect of men in those days was equal to the best of today. Yet in ancient times material progress was painfully slow. The spirit of modern scientific inquiry, research and invention was almost unknown. In the realm of the material, men's minds were fettered by superstition, tradition, and all sorts of fixed ideas. The contemporaries of Columbus thought a round earth preposterous. Others like them came near putting Galileo to death for his astronomical heresies.

We asked ourselves this: are not some of us just as

64 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

biased and unreasonable about the realm of the spirit as were the ancients about the realm of the material? Even in the present century, American newspapers were afraid to print an account of the Wright Brothers first successful flight at Kittyhawk. Had not all efforts at flight failed before? Did not Professor Langley's absurd flying machine go to the bottom of the Potomac river? Was it not true that the best mathematical minds had proved man could never

fly? Had not people said God had reserved this privilege to the birds? Only thirty years later the conquest of the air was almost an old story and airplane travel was in full swing. But in most fields our generation has witnessed complete liberation of our thinking. Show any longshoreman a Sunday supplement describing a proposal to explore the moon by means of a rocket and he will say, "I bet they do it—maybe not so long either." Is not our age characterized by the ease with which we discard old ideas for new, by the complete readiness with which we throw away the theory or gadget which does not work for something new which does?

We had to ask ourselves why we shouldn't apply to our human problems this same readiness to change the point of view. We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were a prey to misery and depression, we couldn't make a living, we had a feeling of uselessness, we were full of fear, we were unhappy, we couldn't seem to be of real help to other people—was not a basic solution of these bedevilements more important than whether we should see newsreels of lunar flight? Of course it was.

WE AGNOSTICS 65

When we saw others solve their problems by simple reliance upon the Spirit of this universe, we had to stop doubting the power of God. Our ideas did not work. But the God idea did.

The Wright Brothers' almost childish faith that they could build a machine which would fly was the mainspring of their accomplishment. Without that, nothing could have happened. We agnostics and atheists were sticking to the idea that self-sufficiency would solve our problems. When others showed us that "God-sufficiency" worked with them, we began to feel like those who had insisted the Wrights would never fly.

Logic is great stuff. We liked it. We still like it. It is not by chance we were given the power to reason, to examine the evidence of our senses, and to draw conclusions. That is one of man's magnificent attributes. We agnostically inclined would not feel satisfied with a proposal which does not lend itself to reasonable approach and interpretation. Hence we are at pains to tell why we think our present faith is reasonable, why we think it more sane and logical to believe than not to believe, why we say our former thinking was soft and mushy when we threw up our hands in doubt and said, "We don't know."

When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is, or He isn't. What was our choice to be?

Arrived at this point, we were squarely confronted with the question of faith. We couldn't duck the issue.

66 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Some of us had already walked far over the Bridge of Reason toward the desired shore of faith. The outlines and the promise of the New Land had brought lustre to tired eyes and fresh courage to flagging spirits. Friendly hands had stretched out in welcome. We were grateful that Reason had brought us so far. But somehow, we couldn't quite step ashore. Perhaps we had been leaning too heavily on Reason that last mile and we did not like to lose our support. That was natural, but let us think a little more closely. Without knowing it, had we

not been brought to where we stood by a certain kind of faith? For did we not believe in our own reasoning? Did we not have confidence in our ability to think? What was that but a sort of faith? Yes, we had been faithful, abjectly faithful to the God of Reason. So, in one way or another, we discovered that faith had been involved all the time!

We found, too, that we had been worshippers. What a state of mental goose-flesh that used to bring on! Had we not variously worshipped people, sentiment, things, money, and ourselves? And then, with a better motive, had we not worshipfully beheld the sunset, the sea, or a flower. Who of us had not loved something or somebody? How much did these feelings, these loves, these worships, have to do with pure reason? Little or nothing, we saw at last. Were not these things the tissue out of which our lives were constructed? Did not these feelings, after all, determine the course of our existence? It was impossible to say we had no capacity for faith, or love, or worship. In one form or another we had been living by faith and little else.

WE AGNOSTICS 67

Imagine life without faith! Were nothing left but pure reason, it wouldn't be life. But we believed in life—of course we did. We could not prove life in the sense that you can prove a straight line is the shortest distance between two points: yet, there it was. Could we still say the whole thing was nothing but a mass of electrons, created out of nothing, meaning nothing, whirling on to a destiny of nothingness? Of course we couldn't. The electrons themselves seemed more intelligent than that. At least, so the chemist said.

Hence, we saw that reason isn't everything. Neither is reason, as most of us use it, entirely dependable though it emanate from our best minds. What about people who proved that man could never fly?

Yet we had been seeing another kind of flight, a spiritual liberation from this world, people who rose above their problems. They said God made these things possible, and we only smiled. We had seen spiritual release, but liked to tell ourselves it wasn't true.

Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured by calamity, by pomp, by worship of other things, but in some form or other it is there. For faith in a Power greater than ourselves, and miraculous demonstrations of that power in human lives, are facts as old as man himself.

We finally saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but He was there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In

68 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

the last analysis it is only there that He may be found. It was so with us.

We can only clear the ground a bit. If our testimony helps sweep away prejudice, enables you to think honestly, encourages you to search diligently within yourself, then if you wish you can join us on the Broad Highway. With this attitude you cannot fail. The consciousness of your belief is sure to come to you.

In this book you will read the experience of a man who thought he was an atheist. His story is so interesting that some of it should be told now. His change of heart was dramatic, convincing, and moving.

Our friend was a minister's son. He attended church school, where he became rebellious at what he thought an overdose of religious education. For years thereafter he was dogged by trouble and frustration. Business failure, insanity, fatal illness, suicide—these calamities in his immediate family embittered and depressed him. Post-war disillusionment, ever more serious alcoholism, impending mental and physical collapse, brought him to the point of self-destruction.

One night, when confined in a hospital, he was approached by an alcoholic who had known a spiritual experience. Our friend's gorge rose as he bitterly cried out: "If there is a God, He certainly hasn't done anything for me." But later, alone in his room, he asked himself this question: "Is it possible that all the religious people I have known are wrong?" While pondering the answer he felt as though he lived in hell. Then, like a thunderbolt, a great thought came. It crowded out all else:

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS 69

"WHO ARE YOU TO SAY THERE IS NO GOD?"

This man recounts that he tumbled out of bed to his knees. In a few seconds he was overwhelmed by a conviction of the Presence of God. It poured over and through him with the certainty and majesty of a great tide at flood. The barriers he had built through the years were swept away. He stood in the Presence of Infinite Power and Love. He had stepped from bridge to shore. For the first time, he lived in conscious companionship with his Creator.

Thus was our friend's cornerstone fixed in place. No later vicissitude has shaken it. His alcoholic problem was taken away. That very night three years ago it disappeared. Save for a few brief moments of temptation the thought of drink has never returned; and at such times a great revulsion has risen up in him. Seemingly he could not drink even if he would. God had restored his sanity.

What is this but a miracle of healing? Yet its elements are simple. Circumstances made him willing to believe. He humbly offered himself to his Maker—then he knew.

Even so has God restored us all to our right minds. To this man, the revelation was sudden. Some of us grow into it more slowly. But He has come to all who have honestly sought Him. When we drew near to Him He disclosed Himself to us!

Chapter Five 70

HOW IT WORKS

RARELY have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.

Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it—then you are ready to take certain steps. At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that we deal with alcohol—cunning, baf-

HOW IT WORKS 71

fling, powerful! Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power—That One is God. May you find Him now!

Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon.

Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a Program of Recovery:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we un-

72 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

derstood Him praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Many of us exclaimed, "What an order! I can't go through with it." Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after make clear three pertinent ideas:

- (a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.
- (b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.
- (c) That God could and would if sought.

[The manuscript has the following here: If you are not convinced on these vital issues, you ought to re-read the book to this point or else throw it away!]

Being convinced, we were at step three, which is that we decided to turn our will and our life over to God as we understood Him. Just what do we mean by that, and just what do we do?

The first requirement was that we be convinced that any life run on self-will could hardly be a success. On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good.

HOW IT WORKS 73

Most people try to live by self-propulsion. Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show: is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wishes, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful. In trying to make these arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. On the other hand, he may be mean, egotistical, selfish and dishonest. But, as with most humans, he is more likely to have varied traits.

What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. He begins to think life doesn't treat him right. He decides to exert himself some more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit him. Admitting he may be somewhat at fault, he is sure that other people are more to blame. He becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. What is his basic trouble? Is he not really a self-seeker even when trying to be kind? Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well? Is it not evident to all the rest of the players that these are the things he wants? And do not his actions make each of them wish to retaliate, snatching all they can get out of the show? Is he not, even in his best moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony? Our actor is self-centered—egocentric, as people like

74 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

to call it nowadays. He is like the retired business man who lolls in the Florida sunshine in the winter complaining of the sad state of the nation; the minister who sighs over the sins of the twentieth century; politicians and reformers who are sure all would be Utopia if the rest of the world would only behave; the outlaw safe cracker who thinks society has wronged him; and the alcoholic who has lost all and is locked up. Whatever their protestations, are not most of us concerned with ourselves, our resentments, or our self-pity? Selfishness—self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, selfdelusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly, without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self, which later placed us in a position to be hurt.

So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without Him. Many of us had

moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help.

This is the how and why of it. First of all we had to

HOW IT WORKS 75

quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal, we are His agent. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most good ideas are simple and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom.

When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of His presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow, or the hereafter. We were reborn.

We were now at step three. Many of us said to our Maker, as we understood Him: "God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!" We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to Him.

We found it very desirable to take this spiritual step with an understanding person, such as our wife, best

76 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

friend, or spiritual adviser. But it is better to meet God alone than with one who might misunderstand. The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation. This was only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once.

Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted. Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us. Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.

Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory. This was step four. A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a factfinding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret. If the owner of the business is to be successful, he cannot fool himself about values.

We did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly. First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being

convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations

HOW IT WORKS 77

Resentment is the "number one" offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick. When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically. In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper. We listed people, institutions or principles with whom we were angry. We asked ourselves why we were angry. In most cases it was found that our self-esteem, our pocketbooks, our ambitions, our personal relationships, (including sex) were hurt or threatened. So we were sore. We were "burned up."

On our grudge list we set opposite each name our injuries. Was it our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our personal, or sex relations, which had been interfered with? We were usually as definite as this example:

<u>I'm resentful at:</u>	<u>The Cause</u>	<u>Affects my:</u>
Mr. Brown	His attention to my wife.	Sex relations.
	Told my wife of my mistress.	Self-esteem (fear)
	Brown may get my job at the office.	Sex relations.
	She's a nut—she snubbed me. She committed her husband for drinking.	Self-esteem (fear)
Mrs. Jones	He's my friend.	Security.
	She's a gossip.	Self-esteem (fear)
		Personal relationship. Self-esteem (fear)

78 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

<u>I'm resentful at:</u>	<u>The Cause</u>	<u>Affects my:</u>
My employer	Unreasonable—Unjust Overbearing—	Self-esteem (fear)
	Threatens to fire me for drinking and padding my expense account.	Security.
My wife	Misunderstands and and nags. Likes Brown.	Pride—Personal sex relations—Security (fear)
	Wants house put in her name.	

We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. When we were finished we considered it carefully. The first thing apparent was that this world and its people were often quite wrong. To conclude that others were wrong was as far as most of us ever got. The usual outcome was

that people continued to wrong us and we stayed sore. Sometimes it was remorse and then we were sore at ourselves. But the more we fought and tried to have our way, the worse matters got. As in war, the victor only seemed to win. Our moments of triumph were short-lived.

It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worth while. But with the alcoholic whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die.

HOW IT WORKS 79

If we were to live, we had to be free of anger. The grouch and the brainstorm were not for us. They may be the dubious luxury of normal men, but for alcoholics these things are poison.

We turned back to the list, for it held the key to the future. We were prepared to look at it from an entirely different angle. We began to see that the world and its people really dominated us. In that state, the wrong-doing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill. How could we escape? We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol.

This was our course: we realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves were sick, too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves 'This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done.'

We avoid retaliation or argument. We wouldn't treat sick people that way. If we do, we destroy our chance of being helpful. We cannot be helpful to all people, but at least God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one.

Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the

80 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other man's. When we saw our faults we listed them. We placed them before us in black and white. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were willing to set these matters straight.

Notice that the word fear is bracketed alongside the difficulties with Mr. Brown, Mrs. Jones, the employer, and the wife. This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it. It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn't deserve. But did not we, ourselves, set the ball rolling? Sometimes we think fear ought to be classed with stealing. It seems to cause more trouble.

We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper, even though we had no resentment in connection with them. We asked ourselves why we had them. Wasn't it because selfreliance failed us? Self-reliance was good as far as it went, but it didn't go far enough. Some of us once had great self-confidence, but it didn't fully solve the fear problem, or any other. When it made us cocky, it was worse.

Perhaps there is a better way—we think so. For we are now on a different basis; the basis of trusting and relying upon God. We trust infinite God rather than our finite selves. We are in the world to play the role He assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity.

HOW IT WORKS 81

We never apologize to anyone for depending upon our Creator. We can laugh at those who think spirituality the way of weakness. Paradoxically, it is the way of strength. The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. All men of faith have courage. They trust their God. We never apologize for God. Instead we let Him demonstrate, through us, what He can do. We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be. At once, we commence to outgrow fear.

Now about sex. Many of us needed an overhauling there. But above all, we tried to be sensible on this question. It's so easy to get way off the track. Here we find human opinions running to extremes—absurd extremes, perhaps. One set of voices cry that sex is a lust of our lower nature, a base necessity of procreation. Then we have the voices who cry for sex and more sex; who bewail the institution of marriage; who think that most of the troubles of the race are traceable to sex causes. They think we do not have enough of it, or that it isn't the right kind. They see its significance everywhere. One school would allow man no flavor for his fare and the other would have us all on a straight pepper diet. We want to stay out of this controversy. We do not want to be the arbiter of anyone's sex conduct. We all have sex problems. We'd hardly be human if we didn't. What can we do about them?

We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where were we at

82 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

fault, what should we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it.

In this way we tried to shape a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life. We subjected each relation to this test—was it selfish or not? We asked God to mold our ideals and help us to live up to them. We remembered always that our sex powers were God-given, and therefore good, neither to be used lightly or selfishly nor to be despised and loathed. Whatever our ideal turns out to be, we must be willing to grow toward it. We must be willing to make amends where we have done harm, provided that we do not bring about still more harm in so doing. In other words, we treat sex as we would any other problem. In meditation, we ask God what we should do about each specific matter. The right answer will come, if we want it.

God alone can judge our sex situation. Counsel with persons is often desirable, but we let God be the final judge. We realize that some people are as

fanatical about sex as others are loose. We avoid hysterical thinking or advice. Suppose we fall short of the chosen ideal and stumble? Does this mean we are going to get drunk? Some people tell us so. But this is only a half-truth. It depends on us and our motives. If we are sorry for what we have done, and have the honest desire to let God take us to better things, we believe we will be forgiven and will have learned our lesson. If we are not sorry, and our conduct continues to harm others, we are quite sure to

HOW IT WORKS 83

drink. We are not theorizing. These are facts out of our experience.

To sum up about sex: we earnestly pray for the right ideal, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity, and for the strength to do the right thing. If sex is very troublesome, we throw ourselves the harder into helping others. We think of their needs and work for them. This takes us out of ourselves. It quiets the imperious urge, when to yield would mean heartache.

If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot. We have listed and analyzed our resentments. We have begun to comprehend their futility and their fatality. We have commenced to see their terrible destructiveness. We have begun to learn tolerance, patience and good will toward all men, even our enemies, for we look on them as sick people. We have listed the people we have hurt by our conduct, and were willing to straighten out the past if we could.

In this book you read again and again that faith did for us what we could not do for ourselves. We hope you are convinced now that God can remove whatever self-will has blocked you off from Him. If you have already made a decision, and an inventory of your grosser handicaps, you have made a good beginning. That being so you have swallowed and digested some big chunks of truth about yourself.

Chapter Six 84

INTO ACTION

HAVING made our personal inventory, what shall we do about it? We have been trying to get a new attitude, a new relationship with our Creator, and to discover the obstacles in our path. We have admitted certain defects; we have ascertained in a rough way what the trouble is; we have put our finger on the weak items in our personal inventory. Now these are about to be cast out. This requires action on our part, which, when completed, will mean that we have admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our defects. This brings us to the fifth step in the Program of Recovery mentioned in the preceding chapter. This is perhaps difficult—especially discussing our defects with another person. We think we have done well enough in admitting these things to ourselves. There is doubt about that. In actual practice, we usually find a solitary selfappraisal insufficient. Many of us thought it necessary to go much further. We will be more reconciled to discussing ourselves with another person when we see good reasons why we should do so. The best reason first: if we skip this vital step, we may not overcome drinking. Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives.

Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost invariably they got drunk. Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is that they never completed their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only thought they had lost their egoism and fear; they only thought they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else all their life story.

More than most people, the alcoholic leads a double life. He is very much the actor. To the outer world he presents his stage character. This is the one he likes his fellows to see. He wants to enjoy a certain reputation, but knows in his heart he doesn't deserve it.

The inconsistency is made worse by the things he does on his sprees. Coming to his senses, he is revolted at certain episodes he vaguely remembers. These memories are a nightmare. He trembles to think someone might have observed him. As fast as he can, he pushes these memories far inside himself. He hopes they will never see the light of day. He is under constant fear and tension—that makes for more drinking.

Psychologists are inclined to agree with us. We have spent thousands of dollars for examinations. We know but few instances where we have given these doctors a fair break. We have seldom told them the whole truth, nor have we followed their advice. Unwilling to be honest with these sympathetic men, we were honest

86 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

with no one else. Small wonder many in the medical profession have a low opinion of alcoholics and their chance for recovery!

We must be entirely honest with somebody if we expect to live long or happily in this world. Rightly and naturally, we think well before we choose the person or persons with whom to take this intimate and confidential step. Those of us belonging to a religious denomination which requires confession, must, and of course, will want to go to the properly appointed authority whose duty it is to receive it. Though we have no religious connection, we may still do well to talk with someone ordained by an established religion. We often find such a person quick to see and understand our problem. Of course, we sometimes encounter people who do not understand alcoholics.

If we cannot, or would rather not do this, we search our acquaintance for a close-mouthed, understanding friend. Perhaps our doctor or psychologist will be the person. It may be one of our own family, but we cannot disclose anything to our wives or our parents which will hurt them and make them unhappy. We have no right to save our own skin at another person's expense. Such parts of our story we tell to someone who will understand, yet be unaffected. The rule is we must be hard on ourself, but always considerate of others.

Notwithstanding the great necessity for discussing ourselves with someone, it may be one is so situated that there is no suitable person available. If that is so, this step may be postponed, only, however, if we hold ourselves in complete readiness to go through with it at the

first opportunity. We say this because we are very anxious that we talk to the right person. It is important that he be able to keep a confidence; that he fully understand and approve what we are driving at; that he will not try to change our plan. But we must not use this as a mere excuse to postpone.

When we decide who is to hear our story, we waste no time. We have a written inventory, and we are prepared for a long talk. We explain to our partner what we are about to do, and why we have to do it. He should realize that we are engaged upon a life-and-death errand. Most people approached in this way will be glad to help; they will be honored by our confidence.

We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past. Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe. Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better. Taking this book down from our shelf we turn to the page which contains the twelve steps. Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are build-

88 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

ing an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last. Is our work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimmed on the cement put into the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand?

If we can answer to our satisfaction, we then look at step six. We have emphasized willingness as being indispensable. Are we now ready to let God remove from us all the things which we have admitted are objectionable? Can He now take them all—every one? Should we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing.

When ready, we say something like this: "My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen. We have then completed step seven. Now we need more action without which we find that "Faith without works is dead." Lets look at steps eight and nine. We have a list of all persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made it when we took inventory. We subjected ourselves to a drastic selfappraisal. Now we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past. We attempt to sweep away the debris which has accumulated out of our effort to live on self-will and run the show ourselves. If we haven't the will to do this, we ask until it comes. Remember it was agreed at the

INTO ACTION 89

beginning we would go to any lengths for victory over alcohol.

Probably there are still some misgivings. As we look over the list of business acquaintances and friends we have hurt, we may feel diffident about going to

some of them on a spiritual basis. Let us be reassured. To some people we need not, and probably should not emphasize the spiritual feature on our first approach. We might prejudice them. At the moment we are trying to put our lives in order. But this is not an end in itself. Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us. It is seldom wise to approach an individual, who still smarts from our injustice to him, and announce that we have gone religious. In the prize ring, this would be called leading with the chin. Why lay ourselves open to being branded fanatics or religious bores? We may kill a future opportunity to carry a beneficial message. But our man is sure to be impressed with a sincere desire to set right the wrong. He is going to be more interested in a demonstration of good will than in our talk of spiritual discoveries.

We don't use this as an excuse for shying away from the subject of God. When it will serve any good purpose, we are willing to announce our convictions with tact and common sense. The question of how to approach the man we hated will arise. It may be he has done us more harm than we have done him and, though we may have acquired a better attitude toward him, we are still not too keen about admitting our faults. Nevertheless, with a person we dislike, we take the bit in our teeth. It is harder to go to an enemy than to a friend,

90 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

but we find it much more beneficial to us. We go to him in a helpful and forgiving spirit, confessing our former ill feeling and expressing our regret.

Under no condition do we criticize such a person or argue. Simply we tell him that we will never get over drinking until we have done our utmost to straighten out the past. We are there to sweep off our side of the street, realizing that nothing worth while can be accomplished until we do so, never trying to tell him what he should do. His faults are not discussed. We stick to our own. If our manner is calm, frank, and open, we will be gratified with the result.

In nine cases out of ten the unexpected happens. Sometimes the man we are calling upon admits his own fault; so feuds of years' standing melt away in an hour. Rarely do we fail to make satisfactory progress. Our former enemies sometimes praise what we are doing and wish us well. Occasionally, they will offer assistance. It should not matter, however, if someone does throw us out of his office. We have made our demonstration, done our part. It's water over the dam.

Most alcoholics owe money. We do not dodge our creditors. Telling them what we are trying to do, we make no bones about our drinking; they usually know it anyway, whether we think so or not. Nor are we afraid of disclosing our alcoholism on the theory it may cause financial harm. Approached in this way, the most ruthless creditor will sometimes surprise us. Arranging the best deal we can we let these people know we are sorry. Our drinking has made us slow to pay. We must lose our fear of creditors no matter how far we

INTO ACTION 91

have to go, for we are liable to drink if we are afraid to face them.

Perhaps we have committed a criminal offense which might land us in jail if known to the authorities. We may be short in our accounts and unable to make good. We have already admitted this in confidence to another person, but we

are sure we would be imprisoned or lose our job if it were known. Maybe it's only a petty offense such as padding the expense account. Most of us have done that sort of thing. Maybe we are divorced, and have remarried but haven't kept up the alimony to number one. She is indignant about it, and has a warrant out for our arrest. That's a common form of trouble too.

Although these reparations take innumerable forms, there are some general principles which we find guiding. Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or reputation, or face jail, but are willing. We have to be. We must not shrink at anything.

Usually, however, other people are involved. Therefore, we are not to be the hasty and foolish martyr who would needlessly sacrifice others to save himself from the alcoholic pit. A man we know had remarried. Because of resentment and drinking, he had not paid alimony to his first wife. She was furious. She went to court and got an order for his arrest. He had commenced our way of life, had secured a position, and was

92 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

getting his head above water. It would have been impressive heroics if he had walked up to the Judge and said, "Here I am."

We thought he ought to be willing to do that if necessary, but if he were in jail, he could provide nothing for either family. We suggested he write his first wife admitting his faults and asking forgiveness. He did, and also sent a small amount of money. He told her what he would try to do in the future. He said he was perfectly willing to go to jail if she insisted. Of course she did not, and the whole situation has long since been adjusted.

Before taking drastic action which might implicate other people we secure their consent. If we have obtained permission, have consulted with others, asked God to help, and the drastic step is indicated we must not shrink.

This brings to mind a story about one of our friends. While drinking, he accepted a sum of money from a bitterly-hated business rival, giving him no receipt for it. He subsequently denied having received the money and used the incident as a basis for discrediting the man. He thus used his own wrong-doing as a means of destroying the reputation of another. In fact, his rival was ruined.

He felt he had done a wrong he could not possibly make right. If he opened that old affair, he was afraid it would destroy the reputation of his partner, disgrace his family and take away his means of livelihood. What right had he to involve those dependent upon him? How could he possibly make a public statement exonerating his rival?

INTO ACTION 93

After consulting with his wife and partner he came to the conclusion that it was better to take those risks than to stand before his Creator guilty of such ruinous slander. He saw that he had to place the outcome in God's hands or he would soon start drinking again, and all would be lost anyhow. He attended church for the first time in many years. After the sermon, he quietly got up and made an explanation. His action met widespread approval, and today he is one of the most trusted citizens of his town. This all happened three years ago.

The chances are that we have domestic troubles. Perhaps we are mixed up with women in a fashion we wouldn't care to have advertised. We doubt if, in

this respect, alcoholics are fundamentally much worse than other people. But drinking does complicate sex relations in the home. After a few years with an alcoholic, a wife gets worn out, resentful, and uncommunicative. How could she be anything else? The husband begins to feel lonely, sorry for himself. He commences to look around in the night clubs, or their equivalent, for something besides liquor. Perhaps he is having a secret and exciting affair with "the girl who understands." In fairness we must say that she may understand, but what are we going to do about a thing like that? A man so involved often feels very remorseful at times, especially if he is married to a loyal and courageous girl who has literally gone through hell for him.

Whatever the situation, we usually have to do something about it. If we are sure our wife does not know, should we tell her? Not always, we think. If she knows in a general way that we have been wild, should we tell

94 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

her in detail? Undoubtedly we should admit our fault. She may insist on knowing all the particulars. She will want to know who the woman is and where she is. We feel we ought to say to her that we have no right to involve another person. We are sorry for what we have done, and God willing, it shall not be repeated. More than that we cannot do; we have no right to go further. Though there may be justifiable exceptions, and though we wish to lay down no rule of any sort, we have often found this the best course to take.

Our design for living is not a one-way street. It is as good for the wife as for the husband. If we can forget, so can she. It is better, however, that one does not needlessly name a person upon whom she can vent jealousy.

Perhaps there are some cases where the utmost frankness is demanded. No outsider can appraise such an intimate situation. It may be both will decide that the way of good sense and loving kindness is to let bygones be bygones. Each might pray about it, having the other one's happiness uppermost in mind. Keep it always in sight that we deal with that most terrible human emotion—jealousy. Good generalship may decide that the problem be attacked on the flank, rather than risk a face-to-face combat.

Should we have no such complication, there is plenty we should do at home. Sometimes we hear an alcoholic say that the only thing he needs to do is to keep sober. Certainly he must keep sober, for there will be no home if he doesn't. But he is yet a long way from making good to the wife or parents whom for years he has so shockingly treated. Passing all understanding is the pa-

INTO ACTION 95

tience mothers and wives have had with alcoholics. Had this not been so, many of us would have no homes today, would perhaps be dead.

The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough. He is like the farmer who came up out of his cyclone cellar to find his home ruined. To his wife, he remarked, "Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?"

Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead. We must take the lead. A remorseful mumbling that we are sorry won't fill the bill at all. We ought to sit down with the family and frankly analyze the past as we now see it, being very

Careful not to criticize them. Their defects may be glaring, but the chances are that our own actions are partly responsible. So we clean house with the family, asking each morning in meditation that our Creator show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindness and love.

The spiritual life is not a theory. We have to live it. Unless one's family expresses a desire to live upon spiritual principles we think we ought not to urge them. We should not talk incessantly to them about spiritual matters. They will change in time. Our behavior will convince them more than our words. We must remember that ten or twenty years of drunkenness would make a skeptic out of anyone. There may be some wrongs we can never fully right.

96 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

We don't worry about them if we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could. Some people cannot be seen—we send them an honest letter. And there may be a valid reason for postponement in some cases. But we don't delay if it can be avoided. We should be sensible, tactful, and considerate and humble without being servile or scraping. As God's people we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone.

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before half through! We are going to know a new freedom and happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.

This thought brings us to step ten, which suggests we continue to take personal inventory and continue to set right any new mistakes as we go along. We vigorously

INTO ACTION 97

commenced this way of living as we cleaned up the past. We have entered the world of Spirit. Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for our life time. Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code.

And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone—even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally, and will find that this has happened automatically. We see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding tempta-

tion. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality—safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. Instead, the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky, nor are we afraid. That is our experience. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition.

It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condi-

98 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

tion. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. "How can I best serve Thee—Thy will (not mine) be done." These are thoughts which must go with us constantly. We can exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will.

Much has already been said about receiving strength, inspiration, and direction from Him who has all knowledge and power. If we have carefully followed directions, we have begun to sense the flow of His Spirit into us. To some extent we have become God-conscious. We have begun to develop this vital sixth sense. But we must go further and that means more action.

Step eleven suggests prayer and meditation. We shouldn't be shy on this matter of prayer. Better men than we are using it constantly. It works, if we have the proper attitude and work at it. It would be easy to be vague about this matter. Yet, we believe we can make some definite and valuable suggestions.

When we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest, or afraid? Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life? But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others. After making our review we ask God's forgive-

INTO ACTION 99

ness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken. On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives. Under these conditions we can employ our mental faculties with assurance for after all God gave us brains to use. Our thought life will be placed on a much higher plane when our thinking is cleared of wrong motives.

In thinking about our day we may face indecision. We may not be able to determine which course to take. Here we ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision. We relax and take it easy. We don't struggle. We are often surprised how the right answers come after we have tried this a while. What used to be the hunch or the occasional inspiration gradually becomes a working part of the mind. Being still inexperienced and just making conscious contact with God, it is not probable that we are going to be inspired at all times. We might pay for this presumption in all sorts of absurd actions and ideas. Nevertheless we find that our thinking will, as time passes, be more and more on the plane of inspiration. We come to rely upon it.

We usually conclude the period of meditation with a prayer that we be shown all through the day what our next step is to be, that we be given whatever we need to take care of such problems. We ask especially for freedom from self-will, and are careful to make no request for ourselves only. We may ask for ourselves, however,

100 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

if others will be helped. We are careful never to pray for our own selfish ends. Many of us have wasted a lot of time doing that, and it doesn't work. You can easily see why. If circumstances warrant, we ask our wives or friends to join us in morning meditation. If we belong to a religious denomination which requires a definite morning devotion, we attend to that also. If not members of religious bodies, we sometimes select and memorize a few set prayers which emphasize the principles we have been discussing. There are many helpful books also. Suggestions about these may be obtained from one's priest, minister, or rabbi. Be quick to see where religious people are right. Make use of what they offer.

As we go through the day, we pause when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves we are no longer running the show, humbly saying to ourselves many times each day "Thy will be done." We are then in much less danger of excitement, fear, anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions. We become much more efficient. We do not tire so easily, for we are not burning up energy foolishly as we did when trying to arrange life to suit ourselves.

It works—it really does.

We alcoholics are undisciplined. So we let God discipline us in the simple way we have just outlined.

But this is not all. There is action and more action. "Faith without works is dead." The next chapter is entirely devoted to step twelve.

Chapter Seven 101

WORKING WITH OTHERS

PRACTICAL experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our twelfth suggestion: Carry this message to other alcoholics! You can help when no one else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail. Remember they are very ill. Life will take on new meaning. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends—this is an experience you must not miss. We know you will not want to miss it. Frequent contact with newcomers and with each other is the bright spot of our lives.

Perhaps you are not acquainted with any drinkers who want to recover. You can easily find some by asking a few doctors, ministers, priests and hospitals. They will be only too glad to assist you. Don't start out as an evangelist or reformer. Unfortunately a lot of prejudice exists. You will be handicapped if you arouse it. Ministers and doctors are competent and you can learn much from them if you wish, but it happens that because of your own drinking experience you can be

uniquely useful to other alcoholics. So cooperate; never criticize. To be helpful is our only aim.

When you discover a prospect for Alcoholics Anonymous, find out all you can about him. If he does not want to stop drinking, don't waste time trying to persuade him. You may spoil a later opportunity. This advice is given for his family also. They should be patient, realizing they are dealing with a sick person.

If there is any indication that he wants to stop, have a good talk with the person most interested in him—usually his wife. Get an idea of his behavior, his problems, his background, the seriousness of his condition, and his religious leanings. You need this information to put yourself in his place, to see how you would like him to approach you if the tables were turned.

Usually it is wise to wait till he goes on a binge. The family may object to this, but unless he is in a dangerous physical condition, it is better to risk it. Don't deal with him when he is very drunk, unless he is ugly and the family needs your help. Wait for the end of the spree, or at least for a lucid interval. Then let his family or a friend ask him if he wants to quit for good and if he would go to any extreme to do so. If he says yes, then his attention should be drawn to you as a person who has recovered. You should be described to him as one of a fellowship who, as a part of their own recovery, try to help others, and who will be glad to talk to him if he cares to see you.

If he does not want to see you, never force yourself upon him. Neither should the family hysterically plead with him to do anything, nor should they tell him much

WORKING WITH OTHERS 103

about you. They should wait for the end of his next drinking bout. You might place this book where he can see it in the interval. Here no specific rule can be given. The family must decide these things. But urge them not to be over-anxious, for that might spoil matters.

Usually the family should not try to tell your story. When possible, avoid meeting a man through his family. Approach through a doctor or an institution is a better bet. If your man needs hospitalization, he should have it, but not forcibly, unless he is violent. Let the doctor if he will tell him he has something in the way of a solution.

When your man is better, the doctor might suggest a visit from you. Though you have talked with the family, leave them out of the first discussion. Under these conditions your prospect will see he is under no pressure. He will feel he can deal with you without being nagged by his family. Call on him while he is still jittery. He may be more receptive when depressed.

See your man alone, if possible. At first engage in general conversation. After a while, turn the talk to some phase of drinking. Tell him enough about your drinking habits, symptoms, and experiences to encourage him to speak of himself. If he wishes to talk, let him do so. You will thus get a better idea of how you ought to proceed. If he is not communicative, give him a sketch of your drinking career up to the time you quit. But say nothing, for the moment, of how that was accomplished. If he is in a serious mood dwell on the troubles liquor has caused you, being careful not to moralize or lecture. If his mood is light, tell him humor-

ous stories of your escapades. Get him to tell some of his. When he sees you know all about the drinking game, commence to describe yourself as an alcoholic. Tell him how baffled you were, how you finally learned that you were sick. Give him an account of the struggles you made to stop. Show him the mental twist which leads to the first drink of a spree. We suggest you do this as we have done it in the chapter on alcoholism. If he is alcoholic, he will understand you at once. He will match your mental inconsistencies with some of his own.

If you are satisfied that he is a real alcoholic, begin to dwell on the hopeless feature of the malady. Show him, from your own experience, how the queer mental condition surrounding that first drink prevents normal functioning of the will power. Don't at this stage refer to this book, unless he has seen it and wishes to discuss it. And be careful not to brand him an alcoholic. Let him draw his own conclusion. If he sticks to the idea that he can still control his drinking, tell him that possibly he can—if he is not too alcoholic. But insist that if he is severely afflicted, there may be little chance he can recover by himself.

Continue to speak of alcoholism as a sickness, a fatal malady. Talk about the conditions of body and mind which accompany it. Keep his attention focussed mainly on your personal experience. Explain that many are doomed who never realize their predicament. Doctors are rightly loath to tell alcoholic patients the whole story unless it will serve some good purpose. But you

WORKING WITH OTHERS 105

may talk to him about the hopelessness of alcoholism, because you offer a solution. You will soon have your friend admitting he has many, if not all, of the traits of the alcoholic. If his own doctor is willing to tell him that he is alcoholic, so much the better. Even though your protege may not have entirely admitted his condition, he has become very curious to know how you got well. Let him ask you that question, if he will. If he does not ask, proceed with the rest of your story. Tell him exactly what happened to you. Stress the spiritual feature freely. If the man be agnostic or atheist, make it emphatic that he does not have to agree with your conception of God. He can choose any conception he likes, provided it makes sense to him. The main thing is that he be willing to believe in a Power greater than himself and that he live by spiritual principles.

When dealing with such a person, you had better use everyday language to describe spiritual principles. There is no use arousing any prejudice he may have against certain theological terms and conceptions, about which he may already be confused. Don't raise such issues, no matter what your own convictions are.

Your prospect may belong to a religious denomination. His religious education and training may be far superior to yours. In that case he is going to wonder how you can add anything to what he already knows. But he will be curious to learn why his own convictions have not worked, and yours seem to work so well. He may be an example of the truth that faith alone is insufficient. To be vital, faith must be accompanied by self sacrifice and unselfish, constructive action. Let

him see that you are not there to instruct him in religion. Admit that he probably knows more about it than you do, but call to his attention the fact that

however deep his faith and knowledge, he could not have applied it, or he would not drink. Perhaps your story will help him see where he fails to practice the very precepts he knows so well. We represent no particular faith or denomination. We are dealing only with general principles common to most denominations. Outline the program of action, explaining how you made a self-appraisal, how you straightened out your past, and why you are now endeavoring to be helpful to him. It is important for him to realize that your attempt to pass this on to him plays a vital part in your own recovery. Actually, he may be helping you more than you are helping him. Make it plain he is under no obligation to you, that you hope only that he will try to help other alcoholics when he escapes his own difficulties. Suggest how important it is that he place the welfare of other people ahead of his own. Make it clear that he is not under pressure, that he needn't see you again, if he doesn't want to. You should not be offended if he wants to call it off, for he has helped you more than you have helped him. If your talk has been sane, quiet and full of human understanding, you have perhaps made a friend. Maybe you have disturbed him about the question of alcoholism. This is all to the good. The more hopeless he feels, the better. He will be more likely to follow your suggestions.

Your candidate may give reasons why he need not follow all of the program. He may rebel at the thought

WORKING WITH OTHERS 107

of a drastic housecleaning which requires discussion with other people. Do not contradict such views. Tell him you once felt as he does, but you doubt whether you would have made much progress had you not taken action. On your first visit tell him about the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. If he shows interest, lend him your copy of this book. Unless your friend wants to talk further about himself, do not wear out your welcome. Give him a chance to think it over. If you do stay, let him steer the conversation in any direction he likes. Sometimes a new man is anxious to proceed at once, and you may be tempted to let him do so. This is sometimes a mistake. If he has trouble later, he is likely to say you rushed him. You will be most successful with alcoholics if you do not exhibit any passion for crusade or reform. Never talk down to an alcoholic from any moral or spiritual hilltop, simply lay out the kit of spiritual tools for his inspection. Show him how they worked with you. Offer him friendship and fellowship. Tell him that if he wants to get well you will do anything to help.

If he is not interested in your solution, if he expects you to act only as a banker for his financial difficulties or a nurse for his sprees, you may have to drop him until he changes his mind. This he may do after he gets hurt some more.

If he is sincerely interested and wants to see you again, ask him to read this book in the interval. After doing that, he must decide for himself whether he wants to go on. He should not be pushed or prodded by you,

108 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

his wife, or his friends. If he is to find God, the desire must come from within.

If he thinks he can do the job in some other way, or prefers some other spiritual approach, encourage him to follow his own conscience. We have no monopoly on God; we merely have an approach that worked with us. But point out that we alcoholics have much in common and that you would like, in any case, to be friendly. Let it go at that.

Do not be discouraged if your prospect does not respond at once. Search out another alcoholic and try again. You are sure to find someone desperate enough to accept with eagerness what you offer. We find it a waste of time to keep chasing a man who cannot or will not work with you. If you leave such a person alone, he may soon become convinced that he cannot recover by himself. To spend too much time on any one situation is to deny some other alcoholic an opportunity to live and be happy. One of our fellowship failed entirely with his first half dozen projects. He often says that if he had continued to work on them, he might have deprived many others, who have since recovered, of their chance.

Suppose now you are making your second visit to a man. He has read this volume and says he is prepared to go through with the twelve steps of The Program of Recovery. Having had the experience yourself, you can give him much practical advice. Let him know you are available if he wishes to make a decision and tell his story, but do not insist upon it if he prefers to consult someone else.

WORKING WITH OTHERS 109

He may be broke and homeless. If he is, you might try to help him about getting a job, or give him a little financial assistance. But you should not deprive your family or creditors of money they should have. Perhaps you will want to take the man into your home for a few days. But be sure you use discretion. Be certain he will be welcomed by your family, and that he is not trying to impose upon you for money, connections, or shelter. Permit that and you only harm him. You will be making it possible for him to be insincere. You may be aiding in his destruction, rather than his recovery.

Never avoid these responsibilities, but be sure you are doing the right thing if you assume them. Helping others is the foundation stone of your recovery. A kindly act once in a while isn't enough. You have to act the Good Samaritan every day, if need be. It may mean the loss of many nights' sleep, great interference with your pleasures, interruptions to your business. It may mean sharing your money and your home, counseling frantic wives and relatives, innumerable trips to police courts, sanitariums, hospitals, jails and asylums. Your telephone may jangle at any time of the day or night. Your wife may sometimes say she is neglected. A drunk may smash the furniture in your home, or burn a mattress. You may have to fight with him if he is violent. Sometimes you will have to call a doctor and administer sedatives under his direction. Another time you may have to send for the police or an ambulance. Occasionally you will have to meet such conditions.

We seldom allow an alcoholic to live in our homes

110 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

for long at a time. It is not good for him, and it sometimes creates serious complications in a family.

Though an alcoholic does not respond, there is no reason why you should neglect his family. You should continue to be friendly to them. The family should be offered your way of life. Should they accept, and practice spiritual principles, there is a much better chance the head of the family will recover. And even though he continues to drink, the family will find life more bearable.

For the type of alcoholic who is able and willing to get well, little charity, in the ordinary sense of the word, is needed or wanted. The men who cry for

money and shelter before conquering alcohol, are on the wrong track. Yet we do go to great extremes to provide each other with these very things, when such action is warranted. This may seem inconsistent, but we think it is not.

It is not the matter of giving that is in question, but when and how to give. That often makes the difference between failure and success. The minute we put our work on a service plane, the alcoholic commences to rely upon our assistance rather than upon God. He clamors for this or that, claiming he cannot master alcohol until his material needs are cared for. Nonsense. Some of us have taken very hard knocks to learn this truth: job or no job—wife or no wife—we simply do not stop drinking so long as we place dependence upon other people ahead of dependence on God.

Burn the idea into the consciousness of every man

WORKING WITH OTHERS 111

that he can get well regardless of anyone. The only condition is that he trust in God and clean house.

Now, the domestic problem: There may be divorce, separation, or just strained relations. When your prospect has made such reparation as he can to his family, and has thoroughly explained to them the new principles by which he is living, he should proceed to put those principles into action at home. That is, if he is lucky enough to have a home. Though his family be at fault in many respects, he should not be concerned about that. He should concentrate on his own spiritual demonstration. Argument and fault-finding are to be avoided like leprosy. In many homes this is a difficult thing to do, but it must be done if any results are to be expected. If persisted in for a few months, the effect on a man's family is sure to be great. The most incompatible people discover they have a basis upon which they can meet. Little by little the family may see their own defects and admit them. These can then be discussed in an atmosphere of helpfulness and friendliness.

After they have seen tangible results, the family will perhaps want to go along. These things will come to pass naturally and in good time, provided, however, the alcoholic continues to demonstrate that he can be sober, considerate, and helpful, regardless of what anyone says or does. Of course, we all fall much below this standard many times. But we must try to repair the damage immediately lest we pay the penalty by a spree.

If there be divorce or separation, there should be no undue haste for the couple to get together. The man

112 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

should be sure of his recovery. The wife should fully understand his new way of life. If their old relationship is to be resumed, it must be on a better basis, since the former did not work. This means a new attitude and spirit all around. Sometimes it is to the best interests of all concerned that a couple remain apart. Obviously, no rule can be laid down. Let the alcoholic continue his program day by day. When the time for living together has come, it will be apparent to both parties.

Let no alcoholic say he cannot recover unless he has his family back. This just isn't so. In some cases the wife will never come back for one reason or another. Remind the prospect that his recovery is not dependent upon people. It is dependent upon his relationship with God. We have seen men get well whose families have not returned at all. We have seen others slip when the

family came back too soon. Both you and the new man must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress. If you persist, remarkable things will happen. When we look back, we realize that the things which came to us when we put ourselves in God's hands were better than anything we could have planned. Follow the dictates of a Higher Power and you will presently live in a new and wonderful world, no matter what your present circumstances! When working with a man and his family, you should take care not to participate in their quarrels. You may spoil your chance of being helpful if you do. But urge upon a man's family that he has been a very sick person and should be treated accordingly. You should

WORKING WITH OTHERS 113

warn against arousing resentment or jealousy. You should point out that his defects of character are not going to disappear over night. Show them that he has entered upon a period of growth. Ask them to remember, when they are impatient, the blessed fact of his sobriety.

If you have been successful in solving your own domestic problems, tell the newcomer's family how that was accomplished. In this way you can set them on the right track without becoming critical of them. The story of how you and your wife settled your difficulties is worth any amount of criticism.

Assuming we are spiritually fit, we can do all sorts of things alcoholics are not supposed to do. People have said we must not go where liquor is served; we must not have it in our homes; we must shun friends who drink; we must avoid moving pictures which show drinking scenes; we must not go into bars; our friends must hide their bottles if we go to their houses; we mustn't think or be reminded about alcohol at all. Our experience shows that this is not necessarily so.

We meet these conditions every day. An alcoholic who cannot meet them, still has an alcoholic mind: there is something the matter with his spiritual status. His only chance for sobriety would be some place like Greenland Ice Cap, and even there an Eskimo might turn up with a bottle of scotch and ruin everything! Ask any woman who has sent her husband to distant places on the theory he would escape the alcohol problem.

In our belief any scheme of combating alcoholism

114 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

which proposes to shield the sick man from temptation is doomed to failure. If the alcoholic tries to shield himself, he may succeed for a time, but usually winds up with a bigger explosion than ever. We have tried these methods. These attempts to do the impossible have always failed.

So our rule is not to avoid a place where there is drinking, if we have a legitimate reason for being there. That includes bars, nightclubs, dances, receptions, weddings, even plain ordinary whoopee parties. To a person who has had experience with an alcoholic, this may seem like tempting Providence, but it isn't.

You will note that we made an important qualification. Therefore, ask yourself on each occasion, "Have I any good social, business, or personal reason for going to this place? Or am I expecting to steal a little vicarious pleasure from the atmosphere of such places?" If you answer these questions satisfactorily, you need have no apprehension. Go or stay away, whatever seems best. But be sure you are on solid spiritual ground before you start and that your

motive in going is thoroughly good. Do not think of what you will get out of the occasion. Think of what you can bring to it. But if you are shaky, you had better work with another alcoholic instead!

Why sit with a long face in places where there is drinking, sighing about the good old days. If it is a happy occasion, try to increase the pleasure of those there; if a business occasion, go and attend to your business enthusiastically. If you are with a person who wants to eat in a bar, by all means go along. Let your

WORKING WITH OTHERS 115

friends know they are not to change their habits on your account. At a proper time and place explain to all your friends why alcohol disagrees with you. If you do this thoroughly, few people will ask you to drink. While you were drinking, you were withdrawing from life little by little. Now you are getting back into the social life of this world. Don't start to withdraw again just because your friends drink liquor.

Your job now is to be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others, so never hesitate to go anywhere, if you can be helpful. You should not hesitate to visit the most sordid spot on earth on such an errand. Keep on the firing line of life with these motives, and God will keep you unharmed.

Many of us keep liquor in our homes. We often need it to carry green recruits through a severe hang-over. Some of us still serve it to our friends provided they are not alcoholic. But some of us think we should not serve liquor to anyone. We never argue this question. We feel that each family, in the light of their own circumstances, ought to decide for themselves.

We are careful never to show intolerance or hatred of drinking as an institution. Experience shows that such an attitude is not helpful to anyone. Every new alcoholic looks for this spirit among us and is immensely relieved when he finds we are not witch-burners. A spirit of intolerance might repel alcoholics whose lives could have been saved, had it not been for such stupidity. We would not even do the cause of temperate drinking any good, for not one drinker in a thousand

116 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

likes to be told anything about alcohol by one who hates it. Someday we hope that Alcoholics Anonymous will help the public to a better realization of the gravity of the alcoholic problem, but we shall be of little use if our attitude is one of bitterness or hostility. Drinkers will not stand for it.

After all, our problems were of our own making. Bottles were only a symbol. Besides, we have stopped fighting anybody or anything. We have to!

Chapter Eight 117

TO WIVES

WITH few exceptions, our book thus far has spoken of men. But what we have said applies quite as much to women. Our activities in behalf of women who drink are on the increase. There is every evidence that women regain their health as readily as men if they try our suggestions.

But for every man who drinks others are involved—the wife who trembles in fear of the next debauch; the mother and father who see their son wasting away.

Among us are wives, relatives, and friends whose problem has been solved, as well as some who have not yet found a happy solution. We want the wives of Alcoholics Anonymous to address the wives of men who drink too much. What they say will apply to nearly everyone bound by ties of blood or affection to an alcoholic.

As wives of Alcoholics Anonymous, we would like you to feel that we understand as perhaps few can. We want to analyze mistakes we have made. We want to leave you with the feeling that no situation is too difficult and no unhappiness too great to be overcome.

We have traveled a rocky road, there is no mistake

118 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

about that. We have had long rendezvous with hurt pride, frustration, self-pity, misunderstanding, and fear. These are not pleasant companions. We have been driven to maudlin sympathy, to bitter resentment. Some of us veered from extreme to extreme, ever hoping that one day our loved ones would be themselves once more.

Our loyalty, and the desire that our husbands hold up their heads and be like other men have begotten all sorts of predicaments. We have been unselfish and self-sacrificing. We have told innumerable lies to protect our pride and our husbands' reputations. We have prayed, we have begged, we have been patient. We have struck out viciously. We have run away. We have been hysterical. We have been terror stricken. We have sought sympathy. We have had retaliatory love affairs with other men.

Our homes have been battle-grounds many an evening. In the morning we have kissed and made up. Our friends have counseled chucking the men and we have done so with finality, only to be back in a little while, hoping, always hoping. Our men have sworn great solemn oaths they were through drinking forever. We have believed them when no one else could, or would. Then, in days, weeks, or months, a fresh out-burst.

We seldom had friends at our homes, never knowing how or when the men of the house would appear. We could make few social engagements. We came to live almost alone. When we were invited out, our husbands sneaked so many drinks that they spoiled the occasion.

TO WIVES 119

If, on the other hand, they took nothing, their self-pity made them killjoys.

There was never financial security. Positions were always in jeopardy or gone. An armored car could not have brought the pay envelopes home. The checking account melted like snow in June.

Sometimes there were other women. How heart breaking was this discovery; how cruel to be told they understood our men as we did not!

The bill collectors; the sheriffs; the angry taxi drivers; the policemen; the bums; the pals; and even the ladies they sometimes brought home—our husbands thought we were so inhospitable. "Joykiller, nag, wet blanket"—that's what they said. Next day they would be themselves again and we would forgive and try to forget.

We have tried to hold the love of our children for their father. We have told small tots that father was sick, which was much nearer the truth than we realized. They struck the children, kicked out door panels, smashed treasured crockery, and ripped the keys out of pianos. In the midst of such pandemonium they

may have rushed out threatening to live with the other woman forever. In desperation, we have even got tight ourselves—the drunk to end all drunks. The unexpected result was that our husbands seemed to like it. Perhaps at this point we got a divorce and took the children home to father and mother. Then we were severely criticized by our husband's parents for desertion. Usually we did not leave. We stayed on and on. We finally sought employment ourselves as destitution faced us and our families.

120 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

We began to ask medical advice as the sprees got closer together. The alarming physical and mental symptoms, the deepening pall of remorse, depression and inferiority that settled down on our loved ones—these things terrified and distracted us. As animals on a treadmill, we have patiently and wearily climbed, falling back in exhaustion after each futile effort to reach solid ground. Most of us have entered the final stage with its commitment to health resorts, sanitariums, hospitals, and jails. Sometimes there were screaming delirium and insanity. Death was often near. Under these conditions we naturally made mistakes. Some of them rose out of ignorance of alcoholism. Sometimes we sensed dimly that we were dealing with sick men. Had we fully understood the nature of the alcoholic illness, we might have behaved differently.

How could men who loved their wives and children be so unthinking, so callous, so cruel? There could be no love in such persons, we thought. And just as we were being convinced of their heartlessness, they would surprise us with fresh resolves and new attentions. For a while they would be their old sweet selves, only to dash the new structure of affection to pieces once more. Asked why they commenced to drink again, they would reply with some silly excuse, or none. It was so baffling, so heartbreaking. Could we have been so mistaken in the men we married? When drinking, they were strangers. Sometimes they were so inaccessible that it seemed as though a great wall had been built around them.

And even if they did not love their families, how

TO WIVES 121

could they be so blind about themselves? What had become of their judgment, their common sense, their will power? Why could they not see that drink meant ruin to them? Why was it, when these dangers were pointed out that they agreed and then got drunk again immediately?

These are some of the questions which race through the mind of every girl who has an alcoholic husband. We hope this book has answered some of them. Perhaps your husband has been living in that strange world of alcoholism where everything is distorted and exaggerated. You can see that he really does love you with his better self. Of course, there is such a thing as incompatibility, but in nearly every instance the alcoholic only seems to be unloving and inconsiderate; it is usually because he is warped and sickened that he says and does these appalling things. Today most of our men are better husbands and fathers than ever before.

Try not to condemn your alcoholic husband no matter what he says or does. He is just another very sick, unreasonable person. Treat him, when you can, as though he had pneumonia. When he angers you, remember that he is very ill.

There is an important exception to the foregoing. We realize some men are thoroughly bad-intentioned, that no amount of patience will make any differ-

ence. An alcoholic of this temperament may be quick to use this chapter as a club over your head. Don't let him get away with it. If you are positive he is one of this type you may feel you had better leave. Is it right to let him ruin your life and the lives of your children?

122 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Especially when he has before him a way to stop his drinking and abuse if he really wants to pay the price.

The problem with which you struggle usually falls within one of four categories:

One: Your husband may be only a heavy drinker. His drinking may be constant or it may be heavy only on certain occasions. Perhaps he spends too much money for liquor. It may be slowing him up mentally and physically, but he does not see it. Sometimes he is a source of embarrassment to you and his friends. He is positive he can handle his liquor, that it does him no harm, that drinking is necessary in his business. He would probably be insulted if called an alcoholic. This world is full of people like him. Some will moderate or stop altogether, and some will not. Of those who keep on, a good number will become true alcoholics after a while.

Two: Your husband is showing lack of control, for he is unable to stay on the water wagon, even when he wants to. He often gets entirely out of hand when drinking. He admits this is true, but is positive that he will do better. He has begun to try, with or without your cooperation, various means of moderating or staying dry. Maybe he is beginning to lose his friends. His business may suffer somewhat. He is worried at times, and is becoming aware that he cannot drink like other people. He sometimes drinks in the morning, and through the day also, to hold his nervousness in check. He is remorseful after serious drinking bouts and tells you he wants to stop. But when he gets over the spree, he begins to think once more how he can drink mod-

TO WIVES 123

erately next time. We think this person is in danger. These are the earmarks of a real alcoholic. Perhaps he can still tend to business fairly well. He has by no means ruined everything. As we say among ourselves, "He wants to want to stop."

Three: This husband has gone much further than husband number two. Though once like number two, he became worse. His friends have slipped away, his home is a near-wreck, and he cannot hold a position. Maybe the doctor has been called in, and the weary round of sanitariums and hospitals has begun. He admits he cannot drink like other people, but does not see why. He clings to the notion that he will yet find a way to do so. He may have come to the point where he desperately wants to stop but cannot. His case presents additional questions which we shall try to answer for you. You can be quite hopeful of a situation like this.

Four: You may have a husband of whom you completely despair. He has been placed in one institution after another. He is violent, or appears definitely insane, when drunk. Sometimes he drinks on the way home from the hospital. Perhaps he has had delirium tremens. Doctors may shake their heads and advise you to have him committed. Maybe you have already been obliged to put him away. This picture may not be as dark as it looks. Many of our husbands were just as far gone. Yet they got well.

Let's now go back to husband number one. Oddly enough, he is often difficult to deal with. He enjoys drinking. It stirs his imagination. His friends feel

124 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

closer over a highball. Perhaps you enjoy drinking with him yourself when he doesn't go too far. You have passed happy evenings together chatting and drinking before your fire. Perhaps you both like parties which would be dull without liquor. We have enjoyed such evening ourselves; we had a good time. We know all about liquor as a social lubricant. Some, but not all of us, think it has its advantages when reasonably used.

The first principle of success is that you should never be angry. Even though your husband becomes unbearable, and you have to leave him temporarily, you should, if you can, go without rancor. Patience and good temper are most necessary. Our next thought is that you should never tell him what he must do about his drinking. If he gets the idea that you are a nag or a killjoy, your chance of accomplishing anything useful may be zero. He will use that as an excuse to drink some more. He will tell you he is misunderstood. This may lead to lonely evenings for you. He may seek someone to console him—*not* always another man.

Be determined that your husband's drinking is not going to spoil your relation with your children or your friends. They need your companionship and your help. It is possible to have a full and useful life, though your husband continues to drink. We know women who are unafraid, even happy, under these conditions. Do not set your heart on reforming your husband. You may be unable to do so, no matter how hard you try.

We know these suggestions are sometimes difficult to follow, but you will save many a heartbreak if you can

TO WIVES 125

succeed in observing them. Your husband may come to appreciate your reasonableness and patience. This may lay the groundwork for a friendly talk about his alcoholic problem. Try to have him bring up the subject himself. Be sure you are not critical during such a discussion. Attempt instead, to put yourself in his place. Let him see that you want to be helpful rather than critical.

When a discussion does arise, you might suggest he read this book, or at least the chapter on alcoholism. Tell him you have been worried, though perhaps needlessly. You think he ought to know the subject better, as everyone should have a clear understanding of the risk he takes if he drinks too much. Show him you have confidence in his power to stop or moderate. Say you do not want to be a wet blanket; that you only want him to take care of his health. Thus you may succeed in interesting him in alcoholism.

He probably has several alcoholics among his own acquaintances. You might suggest that you both take an interest in them. Drinkers like to help other drinkers. Your husband may be willing to talk to one of them.

If this kind of approach does not catch your husband's interest, it may be best to drop the subject, but after a friendly talk your husband will usually revive the topic himself. This may take patient waiting, but it will be worth it. Meanwhile you might try to help the wife of another serious drinker. If you act upon these principles, your husband may stop or moderate.

Suppose, however, that your husband fits the description of number two. The same principles which apply

to husband number one should be practiced. But after his next binge, ask him if he would really like to get over drinking for good. Do not ask that he do it for you or anyone else. Just would he like to?

The chances are he would. Show him your copy of this book and tell him what you have found out about alcoholism. Show him that as alcoholics, the writers of the book understand. Tell him some of the interesting stories you have read. If you think he will be shy of a spiritual remedy, ask him to look at the chapter on alcoholism. Then perhaps he will be interested enough to continue.

If he is enthusiastic your cooperation will mean a great deal. If he is lukewarm, or thinks he is not an alcoholic we suggest you leave him alone. Avoid urging him to follow our program. The seed has been planted in his mind. He knows that over a hundred men, much like himself, have recovered. But don't remind him of this after he has been drinking, for he may be angry. Sooner or later, you are likely to find him reading the book once more. Wait until repeated stumbling convinces him he must act, for the more you hurry him, the longer his recovery may be delayed.

If you have a number three husband, you may be in luck. Being certain he wants to stop, you can go to him with this volume as joyfully as though you had struck oil. He may not share your enthusiasm, but he is practically sure to read the book, and he may go for the program at once. If he does not, you will probably not have long to wait. Again, you should not crowd him. Let him decide for himself. Cheerfully see him

TO WIVES 127

through more sprees. Talk about his condition or this book only when he raises the issue. In some cases it may be better to let someone outside the family present the book. They can urge action without arousing hostility. If your husband is otherwise a normal individual, your chances are good at this stage.

You would suppose that men in the fourth classification would be quite hopeless; but that is not so. Many of Alcoholics Anonymous were like that. Everybody had given them up. Defeat seemed certain. Yet often such men had spectacular and powerful recoveries.

There are exceptions. Some men have been so impaired by alcohol that they cannot stop. Sometimes there are cases where alcoholism is complicated by other disorders. A good doctor or psychiatrist can tell you whether these complications are serious. In any event, try to have your husband read this book. His reaction may be one of enthusiasm. If he is already committed to an institution but can convince you and your doctor that he means business, give him a chance to try our method, unless the doctor thinks his mental condition too abnormal or dangerous. We make this recommendation with some confidence. About a year ago a certain state institution released four chronic alcoholics. It was fully expected they would all be back in a few weeks. Only one of them has returned. The others had no relapse at all. The power of God goes deep!

You may have the reverse situation on your hands. Perhaps you have a husband who is at large, but who should be committed. Some men cannot, or will not get over alcoholism. When they become too dangerous,

128 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

we think the kind thing is to lock them up, of course a good doctor should always be consulted. The wives and children of such men suffer horribly, but not less than the men themselves.

But sometimes you must start life anew. We know women who have done it. If such women adopt a spiritual way of life, their road will be smoother.

If your husband is a drinker, you probably worry over what other people are thinking and you hate to meet your friends. You draw more and more into yourself and you think everyone is talking about conditions at your home. You avoid the subject of drinking, even with your own parents. You do not know what to tell the children. When your husband is bad, you become a trembling recluse, wishing the telephone had never been invented.

We find that most of this embarrassment is unnecessary. While you need not discuss your husband at length, you can quietly let your friends know the nature of his illness. But you must be on guard not to embarrass or harm your husband. When you have carefully explained to such people that he is a sick person, you will have created a new atmosphere. Barriers which have sprung up between you and your friends will disappear with the growth of sympathetic understanding. You will no longer be self-conscious, nor feel that you must apologize as though your husband were a weak character. He may be anything but that. Your new courage, good nature, and lack of self-consciousness will do wonders for you socially.

TO WIVES 129

The same principle applies in dealing with the children. Unless they actually need protection from their father, it is best not to take sides in any argument he has with them while drinking. Use your energies to promote a better understanding all around. Then that terrible tension which grips the home of every problem drinker will be lessened. Frequently you have felt obliged to tell your husband's employer and his friends that he was sick, when as a matter of fact he was tight. Avoid answering these inquiries as much as you can. Whenever possible, let your husband explain. Your desire to protect him should not cause you to lie to people, when they have a right to know where he is and what he is doing. Discuss this with him when he is sober and in good spirits. Ask him what you should do if he places you in such a position again. But be careful not to be resentful about the last time he did so.

There is another paralyzing fear. You may be afraid your husband will lose his position; you are thinking of the disgrace and hard times which will befall you and the children. This experience may come to you. Or you may already have had it several times. Should it happen again, regard it in a different light. Maybe it will prove a blessing! It may convince your husband he wants to stop drinking forever. And now you know that he can stop if he will! Time after time, this apparent calamity has been a boon to us, for it opened up a path which led to the discovery of God.

We have elsewhere remarked how much better life is when lived on a spiritual plane. If God can solve the

130 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

age-old riddle of alcoholism, he can solve your problems too. We wives found that, like everybody else, we were afflicted with pride, self-pity, vanity, and all the things which go to make up the self-centered person; and we were not above selfishness or dishonesty. As our husbands began to apply spiritual principles in their lives, we began to see the desirability of doing so too.

At first, some of us did not believe we needed this help. We thought, on the whole, we were pretty good women, capable of being nicer if our husbands

stopped drinking. But it was a silly idea that we were too good to need God. Now we try to put spiritual principles to work in every department of our lives. When we do that, we find it solves our problems too: the ensuing lack of fear, worry and hurt feelings is a wonderful thing. We urge you to try our program, for nothing will be so helpful to your husband as the radically changed attitude toward him which God will show you how to have. Go along with your husband if you possibly can.

If you and your husband find a solution for the pressing problem of drink, you are, of course, going to be very happy. But all problems will not be solved at once. Seed has started to sprout in a new soil, but growth has only begun. In spite of your new-found happiness, there will be ups and downs. Many of the old problems will still be with you. This is as it should be.

The faith and sincerity of both you and your husband will be put to the test. These workouts should be regarded as part of your education, for thus you will

TO WIVES 131

be learning to live. You will make mistakes, but if you are in earnest, they will not drag you down. Instead, you will capitalize them. A better way of life will emerge when they are overcome.

Some of the snags you will encounter are irritation, hurtfeelings, and resentments. Your husband will sometimes be unreasonable, and you will want to criticize. Starting from a speck on the domestic horizon, great thunderclouds of dispute may gather. These family dissensions are very dangerous, especially to your husband. Often you must carry the burden of avoiding them or keeping them under control. Never forget that resentment is a deadly hazard to an alcoholic. We do not mean that you have to agree with your husband wherever there is an honest difference of opinion. Just be careful not to disagree in a resentful or critical spirit.

You and your husband will find that you can dispose of serious problems easier than you can the trivial ones. Next time you and he have a heated discussion, no matter what the subject, it should be the privilege of either to smile and say, "This is getting serious. I'm sorry I got disturbed. Let's talk about it later." If your husband is trying to live on a spiritual basis, he will also be doing everything in his power to avoid disagreement or contention.

Your husband knows he owes you more than sobriety. He wants to make good. Yet you must not expect too much. His ways of thinking and doing are the habits of years. Patience, tolerance, understanding, and love are the watchwords. Show him these things in yourself and they will be reflected back to you from

132 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

him. Live and let live is the rule. If you both show a willingness to remedy your own defects, there will be little need to criticize each other.

We women carry with us a picture of the ideal man, the sort of chap we would like our husbands to be. It is the most natural thing in the world, once his liquor problem is solved, to feel that he will now measure up to that cherished vision. The chances are he will not, for like yourself, he is just beginning his development. Be patient. Another feeling we are very likely to entertain is one of resentment that love and loyalty could not cure our husbands of alcoholism. We do not like the thought that the contents of a book, or the work of another alcoholic, has accomplished in a few weeks the end for which we

struggled for years. At such moments we forget that alcoholism is an illness over which we could not possibly have had any power. Your husband will be the first to say it was your devotion and care which brought him to the point where he could have a spiritual experience. Without you he would have gone to pieces long ago. When resentful thoughts come, try to pause and count your blessings. After all, your family is reunited, alcohol is no longer a problem, and you and your husband are working together toward an undreamed-of future. Still another difficulty is that you may become jealous of the attention he bestows on other people, especially alcoholics. You have been starving for his companionship, yet he spends long hours helping other men and their families. You feel he should now be yours. The

TO WIVES 133

fact is that he should work with other people to maintain his own sobriety. Sometimes he will be so interested that he becomes really neglectful. Your house is filled with strangers. You may not like some of them. He gets stirred up about their troubles, but not at all about yours. It will do little good if you point that out and urge more attention for yourself. We find it a real mistake to dampen his enthusiasm for alcoholic work. You should join in his efforts as much as you possibly can. We suggest you direct some of your thought to the wives of his new alcoholic friends. They need the counsel and love of a woman who has gone through what you have.

It is probably true that you and your husband have been living too much alone, for drinking many times isolates the wife of an alcoholic. Therefore, you probably need fresh interests and a great cause to live for as much as your husband. If you cooperate, rather than complain, you will find that his excess enthusiasm will tone down. Both of you will awaken to a new sense of responsibility for others. You, as well as your husband, ought to think of what you can put into life, instead of how much you can take out. Inevitably your lives will be fuller for doing so. You will lose the old life to find one much better.

Perhaps your husband will make a fair start on the new basis, but just as things are going beautifully, he dismays you by coming home drunk. If you are satisfied he really wants to get over drinking, you need not be alarmed. Though it is infinitely better he have no relapse at all, as has been true with many of our men,

134 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

it is by no means a bad thing in some cases. Your husband will see at once that he must redouble his spiritual activities if he expects to survive. You need not remind him of his spiritual deficiency—he will know of it. Cheer him up and ask him how you can be still more helpful.

The slightest sign of fear or intolerance may lessen your husband's chance of recovery. In a weak moment he may take your dislike of his high-stepping friends as one of those insanely trivial excuses to drink.

We never, never try to arrange a man's life, so as to shield him from temptation. The slightest disposition on your part to guide his appointments or his affairs so he will not be tempted will be noticed. Make him feel absolutely free to come and go as he likes. This is important. If he gets drunk, don't blame yourself. God has either removed your husband's liquor problem, or He has not. If not, it had better be found out right away. Then you and your husband can get right down to fundamentals. If a repetition is to be prevented, place the problem, along with everything else, in God's hands.

We realize we have been giving you much direction and advice. We may have seemed to lecture. If that is so we are sorry, for we ourselves, don't always care for people who lecture us. But what we have related is based upon experience, some of it painful. We had to learn these things the hard way. That is why we are anxious that you understand, that you avoid these unnecessary difficulties. So to you out there—who may soon be with us—we say "Good luck and God bless you!"

Chapter Nine 135

THE FAMILY AFTERWARD

OUR women folk have suggested certain attitudes a wife may take with the husband who is recovering. Perhaps they created the impression that he is to be wrapped in cotton wool and placed on a pedestal. Successful readjustment means the opposite. All members of the family should meet upon the common ground of tolerance, understanding, and love. This involves a process of deflation. The alcoholic, his wife, his children, his "in-laws," each one is likely to have fixed ideas about the family's attitude towards himself or herself. Each is interested in having his or her wishes respected. We find the more one member of a family demands that the others concede to him, the more resentful they become. This makes for discord and unhappiness.

And why? Is it not because each wants to play the lead? Is not each trying to arrange the family show to his liking? Is he not unconsciously trying to see what he can take from the family life, rather than give?

Cessation of drinking is but the first step away from a highly strained, abnormal condition. A doctor said to us, "Years of living with an alcoholic is almost sure to make any wife or child neurotic. The entire family is, to some extent, ill." Let families realize, as they start their journey, that all will not be fair weather. Each in

136 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

his turn may be footsore and may straggle. There will be alluring shortcuts and by-paths down which they may wander and lose their way.

Suppose we tell you some of the obstacles a family will meet; suppose we suggest how they may be avoided—even converted to good use for others. The family of an alcoholic longs for the return of happiness and security. They remember when father was romantic, thoughtful, and successful. Today's life is measured against that of other years and, when it falls short, the family may be unhappy. Family confidence in dad is rising high. The good old days will soon be back, they think. Sometimes they demand that dad bring them back instantly! God, they believe, almost owes this recompense on a long overdue account. But the head of the house has spent years in pulling down the structures of business, romance, friendship, health—these things are now ruined or damaged. It will take time to clear away the wreck. Though old buildings will eventually be replaced by finer ones, the new structures will take years to complete. Father knows he is to blame; it may take him many seasons of hard work to be restored financially, but he shouldn't be reproached. Perhaps he will never have much money again. But the wise family will admire him for what he is trying to be, rather than for what he is trying to get.

Now and then the family will be plagued by spectres from the past, for the drinking career of almost every alcoholic has been marked by escapades, funny, humiliating, shameful, or tragic. The first impulse will be to

THE FAMILY AFTERWARD 137

bury these skeletons in a dark closet and padlock the door. The family may be possessed by the idea that future happiness can be based only upon forgetfulness of the past. We think that such a view is quite self-centered and in direct conflict with the new way of living.

Henry Ford once made a wise remark to the effect that experience is the thing of supreme value in life. That is true only if one is willing to turn the past to good account. We grow by our willingness to face and rectify errors and convert them into assets. The alcoholic's past thus becomes the principal asset of the family, and frequently it is almost the only one!

This painful past may be of infinite value to other families still struggling with their problem. We think each family which has been relieved owes something to those which have not, and when the occasion requires, each member of it, should be only too willing to bring former mistakes, no matter how grievous, out of their hiding places. Showing others who suffer how we were given help, is the very thing which makes life seem so worth while to us now. Cling to the thought that, in God's hands, the dark past is the greatest possession you have—the key to life and happiness for others. With it you can avert death and misery for them.

It is possible to dig up past misdeeds so they become a blight, a veritable plague. For example, we know of situations in which the alcoholic or his wife have had love affairs. In the first flush of spiritual experience they forgave each other and drew closer together. The

138 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

miracle of reconciliation was at hand. Then, under one provocation or another, the aggrieved one would unearth the old affair and angrily cast its ashes about. A few of us have had these growing pains and they hurt a great deal. Husbands and wives have sometimes been obliged to separate for a time until new perspective, new victory over hurt pride, could be won. In most cases, the alcoholic survived this ordeal without relapse, but not always. So we think that unless some good and useful purpose is to be served, past occurrences should not be discussed.

We families of Alcoholics Anonymous keep few skeletons in the closet. Everyone knows about the others alcoholic troubles. This is a condition which, in ordinary life, would produce untold grief; there might be scandalous gossip, laughter at the expense of other people, and a tendency to take advantage of intimate information. Among us, these are rare occurrences. We do talk about each other a great deal but almost invariably temper such talk by a spirit of love and tolerance.

Another principle we observe carefully is that we do not relate intimate experiences of another person unless we are sure he would approve. We find it better, when possible, to stick to our own stories. A man may criticize or laugh at himself and it will affect others favorably, but criticism or ridicule of him coming from another often produces the contrary effect. Members of a family should watch such matters carefully, for one careless, inconsiderate remark has been known to raise the very devil. We alcoholics are sensitive people.

It takes some of us a long time to outgrow that serious handicap.

Many alcoholics are enthusiasts. They run to extremes. At the beginning of recovery a man will take, as a rule, one of two directions. He may either plunge into a frantic attempt to get on his feet in business, or he may be so enthralled by his new life that he talks or thinks of little else. In either case certain family problems will arise. With these we have experience galore.

We think it dangerous if he rushes headlong at his economic problem. The family will be affected also, pleasantly at first, as they feel their money troubles are to be solved, then not so pleasantly as they find themselves neglected. Dad may be tired at night and preoccupied by day. He may take small interest in the children and may show irritation when reproved for his delinquencies. If not irritable, he may seem dull and boring, not gay and affectionate, as the family would like him to be. Mother may complain of inattention. They are all disappointed, and often let him feel it. Beginning with such complaints, a barrier arises. He is straining every nerve to make up for lost time. He is striving to recover fortune and reputation and feels he is doing very well.

Sometimes mother and children don't think so. Having been neglected and misused in the past, they think father owes them more than they are getting. They want him to make a fuss over them. They expect him to give them the nice times they used to have before he drank so much, and to show his contrition for what they suffered. But dad doesn't give freely of himself.

140 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Resentment grows. He becomes still less communicative. Sometimes he explodes over a trifle. The family is mystified. They criticize, pointing out how he is falling down on his spiritual program.

This sort of thing can be avoided. Both father and the family are mistaken, though each side may have some justification. It is of little use to argue and only makes the impasse worse. The family must realize that dad, though marvelously improved, is still convalescing. They should be thankful he is sober and able to be of this world once more. Let them praise his progress. Let them remember that his drinking wrought all kinds of damage that may take long to repair. If they sense these things, they will not take so seriously his periods of crankiness, depression, or apathy, which will disappear when there is tolerance, love, and spiritual understanding.

The head of the house ought to remember that he is mainly to blame for what befell his home. He can scarcely square the account in his lifetime. But he must see the danger of overconcentration on financial success. Although financial recovery is on the way for many of us, we found we could not place money first. For us, material well-being always followed spiritual progress, it never preceded.

Since the home has suffered more than anything else, it is well that a man exert himself there. He is not likely to get far in any direction if he fails to show unselfishness and love under his own roof. We know there are difficult wives and families, but the man who is getting

THE FAMILY AFTERWARD 141

over alcoholism must remember he did much to make them so. As each member of a resentful family begins to see his shortcomings and admits them to the others, he lays a basis for helpful discussion. These family talks will be con-

structive if they can be carried on without heated argument, self-pity, self-justification, or resentful criticism. Little by little, mother and children will see they ask too much, and father will see he gives too little. Giving, rather than getting, will become the guiding principle.

Assume on the other hand that father has, at the out-set, a stirring spiritual experience. Over-night, as it were, he is a different man. He becomes a religious enthusiast. He is unable to focus on anything else. As soon as his sobriety begins to be taken as a matter of course, the family may look at their strange new dad with apprehension, then with irritation. There is talk about spiritual matters morning, noon and night. He may demand that the family find God in a hurry, or exhibit amazing indifference to them and say he is above worldly considerations. He may tell mother, who has been religious all her life, that she doesn't know what it's all about, and that she had better get his brand of spirituality while there is yet time.

When father takes this tack, the family may react unfavorably. They may be jealous of a God who has stolen dad's affections. While grateful that he drinks no more, they may not like the idea that God has accomplished the miracle where they failed. They often forget father was beyond human aid. They may not see

142 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

why their love and devotion did not straighten him out. Dad is not so spiritual after all, they say. If he means to right his past wrongs, why all this concern for everyone in the world but his family? What about his talk that God will take care of them? They suspect father is a bit balmy!

He is not so unbalanced as they might think. Many of us have experienced dad's elation. We have indulged in spiritual intoxication. Like a gaunt prospector, belt drawn in over the last ounce of food, our pick struck gold. Joy at our release from a lifetime of frustration knew no bounds. Father feels he has struck something better than gold. For a time he may try to hug the new treasure to himself. He may not see at once that he has barely scratched a limitless lode which will pay dividends only if he mines it for the rest of his life and insists on giving away the entire product.

If the family cooperates, dad will soon see that he is suffering from a distortion of values. He will perceive that his spiritual growth is lopsided, that for an average man like himself, a spiritual life which does not include his family obligations may not be so perfect after all. If the family will appreciate that dad's current behavior is but a phase of his development, all will be well. In the midst of an understanding and sympathetic family, these vagaries of dad's spiritual infancy will quickly disappear.

The opposite may happen should the family condemn and criticize. Dad may feel that for years his drinking has placed him on the wrong side of every argument, but that now he has become a superior person,

THE FAMILY AFTERWARD 143

with God on his side. If the family persists in criticism, this fallacy may take a still greater hold on father. Instead of treating the family as he should, he may retreat further into himself and feel he has spiritual justification for so doing.

Though the family does not fully agree with dad's spiritual activities, they should let him have his head. Even if he displays a certain amount of neglect and irresponsibility towards the family, it is well to let him go as far as he likes

in helping other alcoholics. During those first days of convalescence, this will do more to insure his sobriety than anything else. Though some of his manifestations are alarming and disagreeable, we think dad will be on a firmer foundation than the man who is placing business or professional success ahead of spiritual development. He will be less likely to drink again, and anything is preferable to that.

Those of us who have spent much time in the world of spiritual make-believe have eventually seen the childishness of it. This dream world has been replaced by a great sense of purpose, accompanied by a growing consciousness of the power of God in our lives. We have come to believe He would like us to keep our heads in the clouds with Him, but that our feet ought to be firmly planted on earth, nevertheless. That is where our fellow travelers are, and that is where our work must be done. These are the realities for us. We have found nothing incompatible between a powerful spiritual experience, and a life of sane and happy usefulness.

One more suggestion: Whether the family has spiritual convictions or not, they may do well to examine the

144 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

principles by which the alcoholic member is trying to live. They can hardly fail to approve these simple principles, though the head of the house still fails some-what in practicing them. Nothing will help the man who is off on a spiritual tangent so much as the wife who adopts a sane spiritual program, making a better practical use of it. There will be other profound changes in the household. Liquor incapacitated father for so many years that mother became head of the house. She met these responsibilities gallantly. By force of circumstances, she was often obliged to treat father as a sick or wayward child. Even when he wanted to assert himself, he could not, for his drinking placed him constantly in the wrong. Mother made all the plans and gave the directions. When sober, father usually obeyed. Thus mother, through no fault of her own, became accustomed to wearing the family trousers. Father, coming suddenly to life again, often begins to assert himself. This means trouble, unless the family watches for these tendencies in each other and come to a friendly agreement about them.

Drinking isolates most homes from the outside world. Father may have laid aside for years all normal activities—clubs, civic duties, sports. When he renews interest in such things, a feeling of jealousy may arise. The family may feel they hold a mortgage on dad, so big that no equity should be left for outsiders. Instead of developing new channels of activity for themselves, mother and children may demand that he stay home and make up the deficiency.

THE FAMILY AFTERWARD 145

At the very beginning, the couple ought to frankly face the fact that each will have to yield here and there, if the family is going to play an effective part in the new life. Father will necessarily spend much time with other alcoholics, but this activity should be balanced. New acquaintances who know nothing of alcoholism might be made and thoughtful consideration given their needs. The problems of the community might engage attention. Though the family has no religious connections, they may wish to make contact with, or take membership in a religious body.

Alcoholics who have derided religious people will be helped by such contacts. Being possessed of a spiritual experience, the alcoholic will find he has

much in common with these people, though he may differ with them on many matters. If he does not argue about religion, he will make new friends, and is sure to find new avenues of usefulness and pleasure. He and his family can be a bright spot in such congregations. He may bring new hope and new courage to many a priest, minister, or rabbi, who gives his all to minister to our troubled world. We intend the foregoing as a helpful suggestion only. So far as we are concerned, there is nothing obligatory about it. As non-denominational people, we cannot make up others minds for them. Each individual should consult his own conscience.

We have been speaking to you of serious, sometimes tragic things. We have been dealing with alcohol in its worst aspect. But we aren't a glum lot. If newcomers could see no joy or fun in our existence, they wouldn't want it. We absolutely insist on enjoying life. We try

146 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

not to indulge in cynicism over the state of the nations, nor do we carry the world's troubles on our shoulders. When we see a man sinking into the mire that is alcoholism, we give him first aid and place what we have at his disposal. For his sake, we do recount and almost relive the horrors of our past. But those of us who have tried to shoulder the entire burden and trouble of others, find we are soon overcome by them.

So we think cheerfulness and laughter make for usefulness. Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into merriment over a seemingly tragic experience out of the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others.

Everybody knows that those in bad health, and those who seldom play, do not laugh much. So let each family play together or separately, as much as their circumstances warrant. We are sure God wants us to be happy, joyous, and free. We cannot subscribe to the belief that this life is a vale of tears, though it once was just that for many of us. But it is clear that we made our own misery. God didn't do it. Avoid then, the deliberate manufacture of misery, but if trouble comes, cheerfully capitalize it as an opportunity to demonstrate His omnipotence.

Now about health: A body badly burned by alcohol does not often recover overnight, nor do twisted thinking and depression vanish in a twinkling. We are convinced that a spiritual mode of living is a most powerful health restorative. We, who have recovered from serious drinking, are miracles of mental health. But we

THE FAMILY AFTERWARD 147

have seen remarkable transformations in our bodies. Hardly one of our crowd now shows any mark of dissipation.

But this does not mean that we disregard human health measures. God has abundantly supplied this world with fine doctors, psychologists, and practitioners of various kinds. Do not hesitate to take your health problems to such persons. Most of them give freely of themselves, that their fellows may enjoy sound minds and bodies. Try to remember that though God has wrought miracles among us, we should never belittle a good doctor or psychiatrist. Their services are often indispensable in treating a newcomer and following his case afterward.

One of the many doctors who had the opportunity of reading this book in manuscript form told us that the use of sweets was often helpful, of course depending upon a doctor's advice. He thought all alcoholics should constantly have chocolate available for its quick energy value at times of fatigue. He added that occasionally in the night a vague craving arose which would be satisfied by candy. Many of us have noticed a tendency to eat sweets and have found this practice beneficial.

A word about sex relations. Alcohol is so sexually stimulating to some men that they have over-indulged. Couples are occasionally dismayed to find that when drinking is stopped, the man tends to be impotent. Unless the reason is understood, there may be an emotional upset. Some of us had this experience, only to enjoy, in a few months, a finer intimacy than ever. There should be no hesitancy in consulting a doctor or psychol-

148 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

ogist if this condition persists. We do not know of any case where this difficulty lasted long.

The alcoholic may find it hard to re-establish friendly relations with his children. Their young minds were impressionable while he was drinking. Without saying so, they may cordially hate him for what he has done to them and to their mother. The children are sometimes dominated by a pathetic hardness and cynicism. They cannot seem to forgive and forget. This may hang on for months, long after their mother has accepted dad's new way of living and thinking. In time they will see that he is a new man and in their own way they will let him know it. When this happens, they can be invited to join in morning meditation, then they can take part in the daily discussion without rancor or bias. From that point on, progress will be rapid. Marvelous results often follow such a reunion.

Whether the family goes on a spiritual basis or not, the alcoholic member has to if he would recover. The others must be convinced of his new status beyond a shadow of a doubt. Seeing is believing to most families who have lived with a drinker.

Here is a case in point: One of our friends is a heavy smoker and coffee drinker. There was no doubt he overindulged. Seeing this, and meaning to be helpful, his wife commenced to admonish him about it. He admitted he was overdoing these things, but frankly said that he was not ready to stop. His wife is one of those persons who really feel there is something rather sinful about these commodities, so she nagged, and her intol-

THE FAMILY AFTERWARD 149

erance finally threw him into a fit of anger. He got drunk. Of course our friend was wrong—dead wrong. He had to painfully admit that and mend his spiritual fences. Though he is now a most effective member of Alcoholics Anonymous, he still smokes and drinks coffee, but neither his wife nor anyone else stands in judgment. She sees she was wrong to make a burning issue out of such a matter when his more serious ailments were being rapidly cured.

We have three little mottoes which are apropos. Here they are:

"FIRST THINGS FIRST"

"LIVE AND LET LIVE" and

"EASY DOES IT."

TO EMPLOYERS

ONE of our friends, whose gripping story you will read, has spent much of his life in the world of big business. He has hired and fired hundreds of men. He knows the alcoholic as the employer sees him. His present views ought to prove exceptionally useful to business men everywhere.

But let him tell you:

I was at one time assistant manager of a corporation department employing sixty-six hundred men. One day my secretary came in saying that Mr. B—— insisted on speaking with me. I told her to say that I was not interested. I had warned him several times that he had but one more chance. Not long afterward he had called me from Hartford on two successive days, so drunk he could hardly speak. I told him he was through—finally and forever.

My secretary returned to say that it was not Mr. B—— on the phone; it was Mr. B——'s brother, and he wished to give me a message. I still expected a plea for clemency, but these words came through the receiver: "I just wanted to tell you Paul jumped from a hotel window in Hartford last Saturday. He left us a note saying you were the best boss he ever had, and that you were not to blame in any way."

TO EMPLOYERS 151

Another time, as I opened a letter which lay on my desk, a newspaper clipping fell out. It was the obituary of one of the best salesman I ever had. After two weeks of drinking, he had placed his toe on the trigger of a loaded shotgun—the barrel was in his mouth. I had discharged him for drinking six weeks before.

Still another experience: A woman's voice came faintly over long distance from Virginia. She wanted to know if her husband's company insurance was still in force. Four days before he had hanged himself in his woodshed. I had been obliged to discharge him for drinking, though he was brilliant, alert, and one of the best organizers I have ever known.

Here were three exceptional men lost to this world because I did not understand alcoholism as I do now. What irony—I became an alcoholic myself! And but for the intervention of an understanding person, I might have followed in their footsteps. My downfall cost the business community unknown thousands of dollars, for it takes real money to train a man for an executive position. This kind of waste goes on unabated. We think the business fabric is shot through with a situation which might be helped by better understanding all around.

Nearly every modern employer feels a moral responsibility for the well-being of his help, and he tries to meet these responsibilities. That he has not always done so for the alcoholic is easily understood. To him the alcoholic has often seemed a fool of the first magnitude. Because of the employee's special ability, or of his own strong personal attachment to him, the employer has sometimes kept such a man at work long beyond a rea-

152 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

sonable period. Some employers have tried every known remedy. In only a few instances have there been a lack of patience and tolerance. And we, who have

imposed on the best of employers, can scarcely blame them if they have been short with us.

Here, for instance, is a typical example: An officer of one of the largest banking institutions in America knows I no longer drink. One day he told me about an executive of the same bank, who, from his description, was undoubtedly alcoholic. This seemed to me like an opportunity to be helpful, so I spent two hours talking about alcoholism, the malady, and described the symptoms and results as well as I could. His comment was: "Very interesting. But I'm sure this man is done drinking. He has just returned from a threemonths' leave of absence, has taken a cure, looks fine, and to clinch the matter, the board of directors told him this was his last chance."

The only answer I could make was that if the man followed the usual pattern, he would go on a bigger bust than ever. I felt this was inevitable and wondered if the bank were doing the man an injustice. Why not bring him in contact with some of our alcoholic crowd? He might have a chance. I pointed out I had had nothing to drink whatever for three years, and this in the face of difficulties that would have made nine out of ten men drink their heads off. Why not at least afford him an opportunity to hear my story? "Oh no," said my friend, "this chap is either through with liquor, or he is minus a job. If he has your will power and guts, he will make the grade."

TO EMPLOYERS 153

I wanted to throw up my hands in discouragement, for I saw that I had failed to help my banker friend understand. He simply could not believe that his brother-executive suffered from a serious illness. There was nothing to do but wait. Presently the man did slip and was fired. Following his discharge, we contacted him. Without much ado, he accepted the principles and procedure that had helped us. He is undoubtedly on the road to recovery. To me, this incident illustrates lack of understanding as to what really ails the alcoholic, and lack of knowledge as to what part employers might profitably take in salvaging their sick employees.

If you desire to help it might be well to disregard your own drinking, or lack of it. Whether you are a hard drinker, a moderate drinker, or a teetotaler, you may have some pretty strong opinions, perhaps prejudices. Those who drink moderately may be more annoyed with an alcoholic than a total abstainer would be. Drinking occasionally, and understanding your own reactions, it is possible for you to become quite sure of many things, which, so far as the alcoholic is concerned, are not always so. As a moderate drinker, you can take your liquor or leave it alone. Whenever you want to, you control your drinking. Of an evening, you can go on a mild bender, get up in the morning, shake your head, and go to business. To you, liquor is no real problem. You cannot see why it should be to anyone else, save the spineless and stupid.

When dealing with an alcoholic, there may be a natural annoyance that a man could be so weak, stupid

154 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

and irresponsible. Even when you understand the malady better, you may find this feeling rising.

A look at the alcoholic in your organization is many times illuminating. Is he not usually brilliant, fast thinking, imaginative and likeable? When sober, does he not work hard and have a knack of getting things done? If he had these

qualities and did not drink would he be worth retaining? Should he have the same consideration as other ailing employees? Is he worth salvaging? If your decision is yes, whether the reason be humanitarian, or business, or both, then the following suggestions may be helpful.

Can you discard the feeling that you are dealing only with habit, with stubbornness, or a weak will? If this presents difficulty re-reading chapters two and three, where the alcoholic sickness is discussed at length might be worth while. You, as a business man, want to know the necessities before considering the result. If you concede that your employee is ill, can he be forgiven for what he has done in the past? Can his past absurdities be forgotten? Can it be appreciated that he has been a victim of crooked thinking, directly caused by the action of alcohol on his brain?

I well remember the shock I received when a prominent doctor in Chicago told me of cases where pressure of the spinal fluid actually ruptured the brain. No wonder an alcoholic is strangely irrational. Who wouldn't be, with such a fevered brain? Normal drinkers are not so affected, nor can they understand the aberrations of the alcoholic.

Your man has probably been trying to conceal a num-

TO EMPLOYERS 155

ber of scrapes, perhaps pretty messy ones. They maybe disgusting. You may be at a loss to understand how such a seemingly above-board chap could be so involved. But these scrapes can generally be charged, no matter how bad, to the abnormal action of alcohol on his mind. When drinking, or getting over a bout, an alcoholic, sometimes the model of honesty when normal, will do incredible things. Afterward, his revulsion will be terrible. Nearly always, these antics indicate nothing more than temporary conditions.

This is not to say that all alcoholics are honest and upright when not drinking. Of course that isn't so, and such people often may impose on you. Seeing your attempt to understand and help, some men will try to take advantage of your kindness. If you are sure your man does not want to stop, he may as well be discharged: the sooner the better. You are not doing him a favor by keeping him on. Firing such an individual may prove a blessing to him. It may be just the jolt he needs. I know, in my own particular case, that nothing my company could have done would have stopped me, for so long as I was able to hold my position, I could not possibly realize how serious my situation was. Had they fired me first, and had they then taken steps to see that I was presented with the solution contained in this book, I might have returned to them six months later, a well man. But there are many men who want to stop, and with them you can go far. Your understanding treatment of their cases will pay dividends.

Perhaps you have such a man in mind. He wants to

156 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

quit drinking, and you want to help him, even if it be only a matter of good business. You now know more about alcoholism. You can see that he is mentally and physically sick. You are willing to overlook his past performances. Suppose an approach is made something like this:

State that you know about his drinking, that it must stop. You might say you appreciate his abilities, would like to keep him, but cannot, if he continues to drink. A firm attitude at this point has helped many of us.

Next he can be assured that you do not intend to lecture, moralize, or condemn; that if this was done formerly, it was because of misunderstanding. If

possible express a lack of hard feeling toward him. At this point, it might be well to explain alcoholism, the sickness. Say that you believe he is a gravely-ill person, with this qualification—being perhaps fatally ill, does he want to get well immediately? You ask because many alcoholics, being warped and drugged, do not want to quit. But does he? Will he take every necessary step, submit to anything to get well, to stop drinking forever?

If he says yes, does he really mean it, or down inside does he think he is fooling you, and that after rest and treatment he will be able to get away with a few drinks now and then? We believe a man should be thoroughly probed on these points. Be satisfied he is not deceiving himself or you.

Whether you mention this book is a matter for your discretion. If he temporizes and still thinks he can ever drink again, even beer, he might as well be discharged after the next bender which, if an alcoholic, he is almost

TO EMPLOYERS 157

certain to have. He should understand that emphatically. Either you are dealing with a man who can and will get well, or you are not. If not, why waste time with him? This may seem severe, but it is usually the best course.

After satisfying yourself that your man wants to recover and that he will go to any extreme to do so, you may suggest a definite course of action. For most alcoholics who are drinking, or who are just getting over a spree, a certain amount of physical treatment is desirable, even imperative. The matter of physical treatment should, of course, be referred to your own doctor. Whatever the method, its object is to thoroughly clear mind and body of the effects of alcohol. In competent hands, this seldom takes long, nor is it very expensive. Your man will fare better if placed in such physical condition that he can think straight and no longer craves liquor. If you propose such a procedure to him, it may be necessary to advance the cost of treatment, but we believe it should be made plain that any expense will later be deducted from his pay. It is better for him to feel fully responsible.

If your man accepts your offer, it should be pointed out that physical treatment is but a small part of the picture. Though you are providing him with the best possible medical attention, he should understand that he must undergo a change of heart. To get over drinking will require a transformation of thought and attitude. We all had to place recovery above everything, for without recovery we would have lost both home and business.

158 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Can you have every confidence in his ability to recover? While on the subject of confidence, can you adopt the attitude that so far as you are concerned, this will be a strictly personal matter, that his alcoholic derelictions, the treatment about to be undertaken, will never be discussed without his consent? It might be well to have a long chat with him on his return.

To return to the subject matter of this book: It contains full suggestions by which the employee may solve his problem. To you, some of the ideas which it contains are novel. Perhaps you are not quite in sympathy with the approach we suggest. By no means do we offer it as the last word on this subject, but so far as we are concerned, it has worked with us. After all, are you not looking for results rather than methods? Whether your employee likes it or not, he will learn the grim truth about alcoholism. That won't hurt him a bit, though he does not go for this remedy.

We suggest you draw the book to the attention of the doctor who is to attend your patient during treatment. If the book is read the moment the patient is able, while acutely depressed, realization of his condition may come to him.

We hope the doctor will tell the patient the truth about his condition, whatever that happens to be. When the man is presented with this volume it is best that no one tell him he must abide by its suggestions. The man must decide for himself.

You are betting, of course, that your changed attitude and the contents of this book will turn the trick. In some cases it will, and in others it may not. But we think

TO EMPLOYERS 159

that if you persevere, the percentage of successes will gratify you. When our work spreads and our numbers increase, we hope your employees may be put in personal contact with some of us. Meanwhile, we are sure a great deal can be accomplished by the use of the book alone.

On your employee's return, talk with him. Ask him if he thinks he has the answer. If he feels free to discuss his problems with you, if he knows you understand, and will not be upset by anything he wishes to say, he will probably be off to a fast start.

In this connection, can you remain undisturbed if the man proceeds to tell you shocking things? He may, for example, reveal that he has padded his expense account, or that he has planned to take your best customers away from you. In fact, he may say almost anything if he has accepted our solution, which, as you know, demands rigorous honesty. Can you charge this off as you would a bad account and start fresh with him? If he owes you money you may wish to make terms.

If he speaks of his home situation, you can undoubtedly make helpful suggestions. Can he talk frankly with you so long as he does not bear business tales or criticize his associates? With this kind of employee such an attitude will command undying loyalty.

The greatest enemies of we alcoholics are resentment, jealousy, envy, frustration, and fear. Wherever men are gathered together in business, there will be rivalries, and, arising out of these, a certain amount of office politics. Sometimes we alcoholics have an idea that people are trying to pull us down. Often this is not so

160 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

at all. But sometimes our drinking will be used politically. One instance comes to mind in which a malicious individual was always making friendly little jokes about an alcoholic's drinking exploits. In this way he was slyly carrying tales. In another case, an alcoholic was sent to a hospital for treatment. Only a few knew of it at first, but within a short time, it was bill-boarded throughout the entire company. Naturally this sort of thing decreased the man's chance of recovery. The employer can many times protect the victim from this kind of talk. The employer cannot play favorites, but he can always defend a man from needless provocation and unfair criticism.

As a class, alcoholics are energetic people. They work hard and they play hard. Your man should be on his mettle to make good. Being somewhat weakened, and faced with physical and mental readjustment to a life which knows no alcohol, he may overdo. You may have to curb his desire to work sixteen hours a day. You may need to encourage him to play once in a while. He may

wish to do a lot for other alcoholics and something of the sort may come up during business hours. A reasonable amount of latitude will be helpful. This work is necessary to maintain his sobriety.

After your man has gone along without drinking a few months, you may be able to make use of his services with other employees who are giving you the alcoholic run-around-provided, of course, they are willing to have a third party in the picture. An alcoholic who has recovered, but holds a relatively unimportant

TO EMPLOYERS 161

job, can talk to a man with a better position. Being on radically different basis of life, he will never take advantage of the situation.

Your man may be trusted. Long experience with alcoholic excuses naturally arouses suspicion. When his wife next calls saying he is sick, you might jump to the conclusion he is drunk. If he is, and is still trying to recover, he will tell you about it, even if it means the loss of his job. For he knows he must be honest if he would live at all. He will appreciate knowing you are not bothering your head about him at all, that you are not suspicious, nor are you trying to run his life so he will be shielded from temptation to drink. If he is conscientiously following the Program of Recovery he can go anywhere your business may call him.

In case he does stumble, even once, you will have to decide whether to let him go. If you are sure he doesn't mean business, there is no doubt you should discharge him. If, on the contrary, you are sure he is doing his utmost, you may wish to give him another chance. But you should feel under no obligation to keep him on, for your obligation has been well discharged already.

There is another thing you might wish to do. If your organization is a large one, your junior executives might be provided with this book. You might let them know you have no quarrel with the alcoholics of your organization. These juniors are often in a difficult position. Men under them are frequently their friends. So, for one reason or another, they cover these men, hoping matters will take a turn for the better. They often jeopardize their own positions by trying to help serious

162 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

drinkers who should have been fired long ago, or else given an opportunity to get well.

After reading this book, a junior executive can go to such a man and say approximately this, "Look here, Ed. Do you want to stop drinking or not? You put me on the spot every time you get drunk. It isn't fair to me or the firm. I have been learning something about alcoholism. If you are an alcoholic, you are a mighty sick man. You act like one. The firm wants to help you get over it, and if you are interested, there is a way out. If you do, your past will be forgotten and the fact that you went away for treatment will not be mentioned. But if you cannot, or will not stop drinking, I think you ought to resign."

Your junior executive may not agree with the contents of our book. He need not, and often should not, show it to his alcoholic prospect. But at least he will understand the problem and will no longer be misled by ordinary promises. He will be able to take a position with such a man which is eminently fair and square. He will have no further reason for covering up an alcoholic employee.

It boils right down to this: No man should be fired just because he is alcoholic. If he wants to stop, he should be afforded a real chance. If he cannot, or does not want to stop, he should be discharged. The exceptions are few.

We think this method of approach will accomplish several things. It will permit the rehabilitation of good men. At the same time you will feel no reluctance to rid yourself of those who cannot, or will not, stop. Al-

TO EMPLOYERS 163

coholism may be causing your organization considerable damage in its waste of time, men and reputation. We hope our suggestions will help you plug up this sometimes serious leak. We think we are sensible when we urge that you stop this waste and give your worth-while man a chance.

The other day an approach was made to the vice-president of a large industrial concern. He remarked: "I'm mighty glad you fellows got over your drinking. But the policy of this company is not to interfere with the habits of our employees. If a man drinks so much that his job suffers, we fire him. I don't see how you can be of any help to us, for as you see, we don't have any alcoholic problem." This same company spends millions for research every year. Their cost of production is figured to a fine decimal point. They have recreational facilities. There is company insurance. There is a real interest, both humanitarian and business, in the well-being of employees. But alcoholism—well, they just don't believe they have it.

Perhaps this is a typical attitude. We, who have collectively seen a great deal of business life, at least from the alcoholic angle, had to smile at this gentleman's sincere opinion. He might be shocked if he knew how much alcoholism is costing his organization a year. That company may harbor many actual or potential alcoholics. We believe that managers of large enterprises often have little idea how prevalent this problem is. Even if you feel your organization has no alcoholic problem, it might pay to take another look down the line. You may make some interesting discoveries.

164 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Of course, this chapter refers to alcoholics, sick people, deranged men. What our friend, the vice-president, had in mind, was the habitual or whoopee drinker. As to them, his policy is undoubtedly sound, but he did not distinguish between such people and the alcoholic.

It is not to be expected that an alcoholic employee will receive a disproportionate amount of time and attention. He should not be made a favorite. The right kind of man, the kind who recovers, will not want this sort of thing. He will not impose. Far from it. He will work like the devil, and thank you to his dying day.

Today, I own a little company. There are two alcoholic employees, who produce as much as five normal salesmen. But why not? They have a new attitude, and they have been saved from a living death. I have enjoyed every moment spent in getting them straightened out.

Chapter Eleven 165

A VISION FOR YOU

FOR most normal folks, drinking means conviviality, companionship, and colorful imagination. It means release from care, boredom, and worry. It is joyous intimacy with friends, and a feeling that life is good. But not so with us in those last days of heavy drinking. The old pleasures were gone. They were

but memories. Never could we recapture the great moments of the past. There was an insistent yearning to enjoy life as we once did and a heartbreaking obsession that some new miracle of control would enable us to do it. There was always one more attempt—and one more failure. The less people tolerated us, the more we withdrew from society, from life itself. As we became subjects of King Alcohol, shivering denizens of his mad realm, the chilling vapor that is loneliness settled down. It thickened, ever becoming blacker. Some of us sought out sordid places, hoping to find understanding companionship and approval. Momentarily we did—then would come oblivion and the awful awakening to face the hideous Four Horsemen—Terror, Bewilderment, Frustration, Despair. Unhappy drinkers who read this page will understand!

Now and then a serious drinker, being dry at the

166 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

moment says, "I don't miss it at all. Feel better. Work better. Having a better time." As ex-alcoholics, we smile at such a sally. We know our friend is like a boy whistling in the dark to keep up his spirits. He fools himself. Inwardly he would give anything to take half a dozen drinks and get away with them. He will presently try the old game again, for he isn't happy about his sobriety. He cannot picture life without alcohol. Some day he will be unable to imagine life either with alcohol or without it. Then he will know loneliness such as few do. He will be at the jumping-off place. He will wish for the end.

We have shown how we got out from under. You say: "Yes, I'm willing. But am I to be consigned to a life where I shall be stupid, boring and glum, like some righteous people I see? I know I must get along without liquor, but how can I? Have you a sufficient substitute?"

Yes, there is a substitute, and it is vastly more than that. It is a Fellowship in Alcoholics Anonymous. There you will find release from care, boredom, and worry. Your imagination will be fired. Life will mean something at last. The most satisfactory years of your existence lie ahead. Thus we find The Fellowship, and so will you.

"How is that to come about?" you ask. "Where am I to find these people?"

You are going to meet these new friends in your own community. Near you alcoholics are dying helplessly like people in a sinking ship. If you live in a large place, there are hundreds. High and low, rich and poor, these

A VISION FOR YOU 167

are future Fellows of Alcoholics Anonymous. Among them you will make life-long friends. You will be bound to them with new and wonderful ties, for you will escape disaster together and you will commence shoulder to shoulder your common journey. Then you will know what it means to give of yourself, that others may survive and rediscover life. You will learn the full meaning of "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

It may seem incredible that these men are to become happy, respected, and useful once more. How can they rise out of such misery, bad repute and hopelessness? The practical answer is that since these things have happened among us, they can happen with you. Should you wish them above all else, and be willing to make use of our experience, we are sure they will come. The age of miracles is still with us. Our own recovery proves that!

Our hope is that when this chip of a book is launched on the world tide of alcoholism, defeated drinkers will seize upon it, to follow its suggestions. Many,

we are sure, will rise to their feet and march on. They will approach still other sick ones and Fellowships of Alcoholics Anonymous may spring up in each city and hamlet, havens for those who must find a way out.

In the chapter "Working With Others" you gathered an idea of how we approach and aid others to health. Suppose now that through you several families have adopted this way of life. You will want to know more of how to proceed from that point. Perhaps the best way of treating you to a glimpse of your future will be

168 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

to describe the growth of the Fellowship among us. Here is a brief account:

Nearly four years ago, one of our number made a journey to a certain western city. From the business standpoint, his trip came off badly. Had he been successful in his enterprise, he would have been set on his feet financially, which, at the time, seemed vitally important. But his venture wound up in a law suit and bogged down completely. The proceeding was shot through with much hard feeling and controversy. Bitterly discouraged, he found himself in a strange place, discredited and almost broke. Still physically weak, and sober but a few months, he saw that his predicament was dangerous. He wanted so much to talk with someone, but whom? One dismal afternoon he paced a hotel lobby wondering how his bill was to be paid. At one end of the room stood a glass covered directory of local churches. Down the lobby a door opened into an attractive bar. He could see the gay crowd inside. In there he would find companionship and release. Unless he took some drinks, he might not have the courage to scrape an acquaintance, and would have a lonely weekend.

Of course, he couldn't drink, but why not sit hopefully at a table, a bottle of ginger ale before him? Then after all, had he not been sober six months now? Perhaps he could handle, say, three drinks—no more! Fear gripped him. He was on thin ice. Again it was the old, insidious insanity—that first drink. With a shiver, he turned away and walked down the lobby to the

A VISION FOR YOU 169

church directory. Music and gay chatter still floated to him from the bar.

But what about his responsibilities—his family and the men who would die because they would not know how to get well, ah—yes, those other alcoholics? There must be many such in this town. He would phone a clergyman. His sanity returned, and he thanked God. Selecting a church at random from the directory, he stepped into a booth and lifted the receiver. His call to the clergyman led him presently to a certain resident of the town, who, though formerly able and respected, was then nearing the nadir of alcoholic despair. It was the usual situation: home in jeopardy, wife ill, children distracted, bills in arrears, and standing damaged. He had a desperate desire to stop, but saw no way out; for he had earnestly tried many avenues of escape. Painfully aware of being somehow abnormal, the man did not fully realize what it means to be alcoholic.

When our friend related his experience, the man agreed that no amount of will power he might muster could stop his drinking for long. A spiritual experience, he conceded, was absolutely necessary, but the price seemed high upon the basis suggested. He told how he lived in constant worry about those who might find out about his alcoholism. He had, of course, the familiar alcoholic obsession that few knew of his drinking. Why, he argued, should he lose the

remainder of his business, only to bring still more suffering to his family, by foolishly admitting his plight to people from whom

170 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

he made his livelihood? He would do anything, he said, but that.

Being intrigued, however, he invited our friend to his home. Some time later, and just as he thought he was getting control of his liquor situation, he went on a roaring bender. For him, this was the spree that ended all sprees. He saw that he would have to face his problems squarely, that God might give him mastery.

One morning he took the bull by the horns and set out to tell those he feared what his trouble had been. He found himself surprisingly well received, and learned that many knew of his drinking. Stepping into his car, he made the rounds of people he had hurt. He trembled as he went about, for this might mean ruin, particularly to a person in his line of business.

At midnight he came home exhausted, but very happy. He has not had a drink since. As we shall see, he now means a great deal to his community, and the major liabilities of thirty years of hard drinking have been repaired in four.

But life was not easy for the two friends. Plenty of difficulties presented themselves. Both saw that they must keep spiritually active. One day they called up the head nurse of a local hospital. They explained their need and inquired if she had a first class alcoholic prospect.

She replied, "Yes, we've got a corker. He's just beaten up a couple of nurses. Goes off his head completely when drinking. But he's a grand chap when sober, though he's been in here six times in the last four months. Understand he was once a well-known lawyer

A VISION FOR YOU 171

in town, but just now we've got him strapped down tight." Here was a prospect all right, but, by the description, none too promising. The use of spiritual principles in such cases was not so well understood as it is now. But one of the friends said, "Put him in a private room. We'll be down." Two days later, a future Fellow of Alcoholics Anonymous stared glassily at the strangers beside his bed. "Who are you fellows, and why this private room? I was always in a ward before."

Said one of the visitors, "We're giving you a treatment for alcoholism."

Hopelessness was written large on the man's face as he replied: "Oh, but that's no use. Nothing would fix me. I'm a goner. The last three times, I got drunk on the way home from here. I'm afraid to go out the door. I can't understand it."

For an hour, the two friends told him about their drinking experiences. Over and over, he would say: "That's me. That's me. I drink like that."

The man in the bed was told of the acute poisoning from which he suffered, how it deteriorates the body of an alcoholic and warps his mind. There was much talk about the mental state preceding the first drunk.

"Yes, that's me," said the sick man, "the very image. You fellows know your stuff all right, but I don't see what good it'll do. You fellows are somebody. I was once, but I'm a nobody now. From what you tell me, I know more than ever I can't stop." At this both the visitors burst into a laugh. Said the future Fellow

172 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Anonymous: "Damn little to laugh about that I can see."

The two friends spoke of their spiritual experience and told him about the course of action they carried out.

He interrupted: "I used to be strong for the church, but that won't fix it. I've prayed to God on hangover mornings and sworn that I'd never touch another drop but by nine o'clock I'd be boiled as an owl."

Next day found the prospect more receptive. He had been thinking it over. "Maybe you're right," he said. "God ought to be able to do anything." Then he added, "He sure didn't do much for me when I was trying to fight this booze racket alone."

On the third day the lawyer gave his life to the care and direction of his Creator, and said he was perfectly willing to do anything necessary. His wife came, scarcely daring to be hopeful, but she thought she saw something different about her husband already. He had begun to have a spiritual experience.

That afternoon he put on his clothes and walked from the hospital a free man. He entered a political campaign, making speeches, frequenting men's gathering places of all sorts, often staying up all night. He lost the race by only a narrow margin. But he had found God—and in finding God had found himself.

That was in June, 1935. He never drank again. He too, has become a respected and useful member of his community. He has helped other men recover, and is a power in the church from which he was long absent.

So, you see, there were three alcoholics in that town, who now felt they had to give to others what they had

A VISION FOR YOU 173

found, or be sunk. After several failures to find others, a fourth turned up. He came through an acquaintance who had heard the good news. He proved to be a devil-may-care young fellow whose parents could not make out whether he wanted to stop drinking or not. They were deeply religious people, much shocked by their son's refusal to have anything to do with the church. He suffered horribly from his spees, but it seemed as if nothing could be done for him. He consented, however, to go to the hospital, where he occupied the very room recently vacated by the lawyer.

He had three visitors. After a bit, he said: "The way you fellows put this spiritual stuff makes sense. I'm ready to do business. I guess the old folks were right after all." So one more was added to the Fellowship.

All this time our friend of the hotel lobby incident remained in that town. He was there three months. He now returned home, leaving behind his first acquaintance, the lawyer, and the devil-may-care chap. These men had found something brand new in life. Though they knew they must help other alcoholics if they would remain sober, that motive became secondary. It was transcended by the happiness they found in giving themselves for others. They shared their homes, their slender resources, and gladly devoted their spare hours to fellow-sufferers. They were willing, by day or night, to place a new man in the hospital and visit him afterward. They grew in numbers. They experienced a few distressing failures, but in those cases, they made an effort to bring the man's family into a spiritual way of living, thus relieving much worry and suffering.

174 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

A year and six months later these three had succeeded with seven more. Seeing much of each other, scarce an evening passed that someone's home did

not shelter a little gathering of men and women, happy in their release, and constantly thinking how they might present their discovery to some newcomer. In addition to these casual get-togethers, it became customary to set apart one night a week for a meeting to be attended by anyone or everyone interested in a spiritual way of life. Aside from fellowship and sociability, the prime object was to provide a time and place where new people might bring their problems. Outsiders became interested. One man and his wife placed their large home at the disposal of this strangely assorted crowd. This couple has since become so fascinated that they have dedicated their home to the work. Many a distracted wife has visited this house to find loving and understanding companionship among women who knew their problem, to hear from the lips of men like their husbands what had happened to them, to be advised how her own wayward mate might be hospitalized and approached when next he stumbled.

Many a man, yet dazed from his hospital experience, has stepped over the threshold of that home into freedom. Many an alcoholic who entered there came away with an answer. He succumbed to that gay crowd inside, who laughed at their misfortune and understood him. Impressed by those who visited him at the hospital, he capitulated entirely, when, later, in an upper room of this house, he heard the story of some man whose experience closely tallied with his own. The

A VISION FOR YOU 175

expression on the faces of the women, that indefinable something in the eyes of the men, the stimulating and electric atmosphere of the place, conspired to let him know that here was haven at last.

The very practical approach to his problems, the absence of intolerance of any kind, the informality, the genuine democracy, the uncanny understanding which these people had were irresistible. He and his wife would leave elated by the thought of what they could now do for some stricken acquaintance and his family. They knew they had a host of new friends; it seemed they had known these strangers always. They had seen miracles, and one was to come to them. They had visioned The Great Reality—their loving and All Powerful Creator.

Now, this house will hardly accommodate its weekly visitors, for they number sixty or eighty as a rule. Alcoholics are being attracted from far and near. From surrounding towns, families drive long distances to be present. A community thirty miles away has fifteen Fellows of Alcoholics Anonymous. Being a large place, we think that some day its Fellowship will number many hundreds.

But life among Alcoholics Anonymous is more than attending gatherings and visiting hospitals. Cleaning up old scrapes, helping to settle family differences, explaining the disinherited son to his irate parents, lending money and securing jobs for each other, when justified—these are everyday occurrences. No one is too discredited, nor has sunk too low to be welcomed cordially—if he means business. Social distinctions, petty

176 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

rivalries and jealousies—these are laughed out of countenance. Being wrecked in the same vessel, being restored and united under one God, with hearts and minds attuned to the welfare of others, the things which matter so much to some people no longer signify much to them. How could they?

Under only slightly different conditions, the same thing is taking place in several eastern cities. In one of these there is a well-known hospital for the

treatment of alcoholic and drug addiction. Four years ago one of our number was a patient there. Many of us have felt, for the first time, the Presence and Power of God within its walls. We are greatly indebted to the doctor in attendance there, for he, although it might prejudice his own work, has told us his belief in our work.

Every few days this doctor suggests our approach to one of his patients. Understanding our work, he can do this with an eye to selecting those who are willing and able to recover on a spiritual basis. Many of us, former patients, go there to help. Then, in this eastern city, there are informal meetings such as we have described to you, where you may see thirty or forty, there are the same fast friendships, there is the same helpfulness to one another as you find among our western friends. There is a good bit of travel between East and West and we foresee a great increase in this helpful interchange.

Some day we hope that every alcoholic who journeys will find a Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous at his destination. To some extent this is already true. Some of us are salesmen and go about. Little clusters of twos

A VISION FOR YOU 177

and threes and fives of us have sprung up in other communities, through contact with our two larger centers. Those of us who travel drop in as often as we can. This practice enables us to lend a hand, at the same time avoiding certain alluring distractions of the road, about which any traveling man can inform you.

Thus we grow. And so can you, though you be but one man with this book in your hand. We believe and hope it contains all you will need to begin.

We know what you are thinking. You are saying to yourself: "I'm jittery and alone. I couldn't do that." But you can. You forget that you have just now tapped a source of power so much greater than yourself. To duplicate, with such backing, what we have accomplished is only a matter of willingness, patience and labor.

We know a former alcoholic who was living in a large community. He had lived there but a few weeks when he found that the place probably contained more alcoholics per square mile than any city in the country. This was only a few days ago at this writing. The authorities were much concerned. He got in touch with a prominent psychiatrist who has undertaken certain responsibilities for the mental health of the community. The doctor proved to be able and exceedingly anxious to adopt any workable method of handling the situation. So he inquired, what did our friend have on the ball?

Our friend proceeded to tell him. And with such good effect that the doctor agreed to a test among his patients and certain other alcoholics from a clinic which he attends. Arrangements were also made with the chief

178 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

psychiatrist of a large public hospital to select still others from the stream of misery which flows through that institution.

So our fellow worker will soon have friends galore. Some of them may sink and perhaps never get up, but if our experience is a criterion, more than half of those approached will become Fellows of Alcoholics Anonymous. When a few men in this city have found themselves, and have discovered the joy of helping others to face life again, there will be no stopping until everyone in that town has had his opportunity to recover—if he can and will.

Still you may say: "But I will not have the benefit of contact with you who write this book." We cannot be sure. God will determine that, so you must remember that your real reliance is always upon Him. He will show you how to create the Fellowship you crave.

Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the Great Fact for us.

Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to him and your fellows. Clear away

A VISION FOR YOU 179

the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find, and join us. We shall be with you, in the Fellowship of The Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny.

May God bless you and keep you—until then.

PERSONAL STORIES 183

THE DOCTOR'S NIGHTMARE

I WAS born in a small New England village of about seven thousand souls. The general moral standard was, as I recall it, far above the average. No beer or liquor was sold in the neighborhood, except at the State liquor agency where perhaps one might procure a pint if he could convince the agent that he really needed it. Without this proof the expectant purchaser would be forced to depart empty handed with none of what I later came to believe was the great panacea for all human ills. Men who had liquor shipped in from Boston or New York by express were looked upon with great distrust and disfavor by most of the good townspeople. The town was well supplied with churches and schools in which I pursued my early educational activities.

My father was a professional man of recognized ability and both my father and mother were most active in church affairs. Both father and mother were considerably above the average in intelligence.

Unfortunately for me I was the only child, which perhaps engendered the selfishness which played such an important part in bringing on my alcoholism.

From childhood through high school I was more or less forced to go to church, Sunday School and evening service, Monday night Christian Endeavor and sometimes to Wednesday evening prayer meeting. This had the effect of making me resolve that when I was free

184 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

from parental domination, I would never again darken the doors of a church. This resolution I kept steadfastly for the next forty years, except when circumstances made it seem unwise to absent myself.

After high school came four years in one of the best colleges in the country where drinking seemed to be a major extra-curricular activity. Almost every-

one seemed to do it. I did it more and more, and had lots of fun without much grief, either physical or financial. I seemed to be able to snap back the next morning better than most of my fellow drinkers, who were cursed (or perhaps blessed) with a great deal of morning-after nausea. Never once in my life have I had a headache, which fact leads me to believe that I was an alcoholic almost from the start. My whole life seemed to be centered around doing what I wanted to do, without regard for the rights, wishes, or privileges of anyone else; a state of mind which became more and more predominant as the years passed. I was graduated with "summa cum laude" in the eyes of the drinking fraternity, but not in the eyes of the Dean.

The next three years I spent in Boston, Chicago, and Montreal in the employ of a large manufacturing concern, selling railway supplies, gas engines of all sorts, and many other items of heavy hardware. During these years, I drank as much as my purse permitted, still without paying too great a penalty, although I was beginning to have morning "jitters" at times. I lost only a half day's work during these three years.

My next move was to take up the study of medicine, entering one of the largest universities in the country.

THE DOCTOR'S NIGHTMARE 185

There I took up the business of drinking with much greater earnestness than I had previously shown. On account of my enormous capacity for beer, I was elected to membership in one of the drinking societies, and soon became one of the leading spirits. Many mornings I have gone to classes, and even though fully prepared, would turn and walk back to the fraternity house because of my jitters, not daring to enter the classroom for fear of making a scene should I be called on for recitation.

This went from bad to worse until sophomore spring when, after a prolonged period of drinking, I made up my mind that I could not complete my course, so I packed my grip and went South and spent a month on a large farm owned by a friend of mine. When I got the fog out of my brain, I decided that quitting school was very foolish and that I had better return and continue my work. When I reached school, I discovered the faculty had other ideas on the subject. After much argument they allowed me to return and take my exams, all of which I passed creditably. But they were much disgusted and told me they would attempt to struggle along without my presence. After many painful discussions, they finally gave me my credits and I migrated to another of the leading universities of the country and entered as a Junior that Fall.

There my drinking became so much worse that the boys in the fraternity house where I lived felt forced to send for my father, who made a long journey in the vain endeavor to get me straightened around. This had

186 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

little effect however for I kept on drinking and used a great deal more hard liquor than in former years.

Coming up to final exams I went on a particularly strenuous spree. When I went in to write the examinations, my hand trembled so I could not hold a pencil. I passed in at least three absolutely blank books. I was, of course, soon on the carpet and the upshot was that I had to go back for two more quarters and remain absolutely dry, if I wished to graduate. This I did, and proved myself satisfactory to the faculty, both in deportment and scholastically.

I conducted myself so creditably that I was able to secure a much coveted internship in a western city, where I spent two years. During these two years I was kept so busy that I hardly left the hospital at all. Consequently, I could not get into any trouble.

When those two years were up, I opened an office downtown.

Then I had some money, all the time in the world, and considerable stomach trouble. I soon discovered that a couple of drinks would alleviate my gastric distress, at least for a few hours at a time, so it was not at all difficult for me to return to my former excessive indulgence.

By this time I was beginning to pay very dearly physically and, in hope of relief, voluntarily incarcerated myself at least a dozen times in one of the local sanitariums. I was between Scylla and Charybdis now, because if I did not drink my stomach tortured me, and if I did, my nerves did the same thing. After three years of this, I wound up in the local hospital where they attempted to help me, but I would get my friends

THE DOCTOR'S NIGHTMARE 187

to smuggle me a quart, or I would steal the alcohol about the building, so that I got rapidly worse.

Finally my father had to send a doctor out from my home town who managed to get me back there some way and I was in bed about two months before I could venture out of the house. I stayed about town a couple of months more and returned to resume my practice. I think I must have been thoroughly scared by what had happened, or by the doctor, or probably both, so that I did not touch a drink again until the country went dry.

With the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment I felt quite safe. I knew everyone would buy a few bottles, or cases, of liquor as their exchequers permitted, and it would soon be gone. Therefore it would make no great difference, even if I should do some drinking. At that time I was not aware of the almost unlimited supply the government made it possible for us doctors to obtain, neither had I any knowledge of the bootlegger who soon appeared on the horizon. I drank with moderation at first, but it took me only a relatively short time to drift back into the old habits which had wound up so disastrously before.

During the next few years, I developed two distinct phobias. One was the fear of not sleeping, and the other was the fear of running out of liquor. Not being a man of means, I knew that if I did not stay sober enough to earn money, I would run out of liquor. Most of the time, therefore, I did not take the morning drink which I craved so badly, but instead would fill up on large doses of sedatives to quiet the jitters, which distressed me terribly. Occasionally, I would yield to the

188 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

morning craving, but if I did, it would be only a few hours before I would be quite unfit for work. This would lessen my chances of smuggling some home that evening, which in turn would mean a night of futile tossing around in bed followed by a morning of unbearable jitters. During the subsequent fifteen years I had sense enough never to go to the hospital if I had been drinking, and very seldom did I receive patients. I would sometimes hide out in one of the clubs of which I was a member, and had the habit at times of registering at a hotel under a fictitious name. But my friends usually found me and I would go home if they promised that I should not be scolded.

If my wife were planning to go out in the afternoon, I would get a large supply of liquor and smuggle it home and hide it in the coal bin, the clothes chute, over door jambs, over beams in the cellar and in cracks in the cellar tile. I also made use of old trunks and chests, the old can container, and even the ash container. The water tank on the toilet I never used, because that looked too easy. I found out later that my wife inspected it frequently. I used to put eight or twelve ounce bottles of alcohol in a fur lined glove and toss it onto the back airing porch when winter days got dark enough. My bootlegger had hidden alcohol at the back steps where I could get it at my convenience. Sometimes I would bring it in my pockets, but they were inspected, and that became too risky. I used also to put it up in four ounce bottles and stick several in my stocking tops. This worked nicely until my wife and I went to see Wallace Beery in "Tugboat Annie,"

THE DOCTOR'S NIGHTMARE 189

after which the pant-leg and stocking racket were out! I will not take space to relate all my hospital or sanitarium experiences.

During all this time we became more or less ostracized by our friends. We could not be invited out because I would surely get tight and my wife dared not invite people in for the same reason. My phobia for sleeplessness demanded that I get drunk every night, but in order to get more liquor for the next night, I had to stay sober during the day, at least up to four o'clock. This routine went on with few interruptions for seventeen years. It was really a horrible nightmare, this earning money, getting liquor, smuggling it home, getting drunk, morning jitters, taking large doses of sedatives to make it possible for me to earn more money, and so on ad nauseam. I used to promise my wife, my friends, and my children that I would drink no more—promises which seldom kept me sober even through the day, though I was very sincere when I made them.

For the benefit of those experimentally inclined, I should mention the so-called beer experiment. When beer first came back, I thought that I was safe. I could drink all I wanted of that. It was harmless; nobody ever got drunk on beer. So I filled the cellar full, with the permission of my good wife. It was not long before I was drinking at least a case and a half a day. I put on thirty pounds weight in about two months, looked like a pig, and was uncomfortable from shortness of breath. It then occurred to me that after one was all smelled up with beer nobody could tell what had been drunk, so I began to fortify my beer with straight

190 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

alcohol. Of course, the result was very bad, and that ended the beer experiment.

About the time of the beer experiment I was thrown in with a crowd of people who attracted me because of their seeming poise, health, and happiness. They spoke with great freedom from embarrassment, which I could never do, and they seemed very much at ease on all occasions and appeared very healthy. More than these attributes, they seemed to be happy. I was self-conscious and ill at ease most of the time, my health was at the breaking point, and I was thoroughly miserable. I sensed they had something I did not have, from which I might readily profit. I learned that it was something of a spiritual nature, which did not appeal to me very much, but I thought it could do no harm. I gave the matter much time and study for the next two and a half years, but

still got tight every night nevertheless. I read everything I could find, and talked to everyone who I thought knew anything about it.

My good wife became deeply interested and it was her interest that sustained mine, though I at no time sensed that it might be an answer to my liquor problem. How my wife kept her faith and courage during all those years, I'll never know, but she did. If she had not, I know I would have been dead a long time ago. For some reason, we alcoholics seem to have the gift of picking out the world's finest women. Why they should be subjected to the tortures we inflicted upon them, I cannot explain.

About this time a lady called up my wife one Saturday afternoon, saying she wanted me to come over that

THE DOCTOR'S NIGHTMARE 191

evening to meet a friend of hers who might help me. It was the day before Mother's Day and I had come home plastered, carrying a big potted plant which I set down on the table and forthwith went upstairs and passed out. The next day she called again. Wishing to be polite, though I felt very badly, I said, "Let's make the call," and extracted from my wife a promise that we would not stay over fifteen minutes.

We entered her house at exactly five o'clock and it was eleven fifteen when we left. I had a couple of shorter talks with this man afterward, and stopped drinking abruptly. This dry spell lasted for about three weeks; Then I went to Atlantic City to attend several days' meeting of a National Society of which I was a member. I drank all the Scotch they had on the train and bought several quarts on my way to the hotel. This was on Sunday. I got tight that night, stayed sober Monday till after the dinner and then proceeded to get tight again. I drank all I dared in the bar, and then went to my room to finish the job. Tuesday I started in the morning, getting well organized by noon. I did not want to disgrace myself, so I then checked out. I bought some more liquor on the way to the depot. I had to wait some time for the train. I remember nothing from then on until I woke up at a friend's house, in a town near home. These good people notified my wife, who sent my newly-made friend over to get me. He came and got me home and to bed, gave me a few drinks that night, and one bottle of beer the next morning.

192 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

That was June 10, 1935, and that was my last drink. As I write nearly four years have passed.

The question which might naturally come into your mind would be: "what did the man do or say that was different from what others had done or said?" It must be remembered that I had read a great deal and talked to everyone who knew, or thought they knew, anything about the subject of alcoholism. This man was a man who had experienced many years of frightful drinking, who had had most all the drunkard's experience known to man, but who had been cured by the very means I had been trying to employ, that is to say, the spiritual approach. He gave me information about the subject of alcoholism which was undoubtedly helpful. Of far more importance was the fact that he was the first living human with whom I had ever talked, who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience. In other words, he talked my language. He knew all the answers, and certainly not because he had picked them up in his reading.

It is a most wonderful blessing to be relieved of the terrible curse with which I was afflicted. My health is good and I have regained my self-respect and the respect of my colleagues. My home life is ideal and my business is as good as can be expected in these uncertain times.

I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for four reasons:

1. Sense of duty.
2. It is a pleasure.

THE DOCTOR'S NIGHTMARE 193

3. Because in so doing I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me.
4. Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip.

Unlike most of our crowd, I did not get over my craving for liquor much during the first two and one-half years of abstinence. It was almost always with me. But at no time have I been anywhere near yielding. I used to get terribly upset when I saw my friends drink and knew I could not, but I schooled myself to believe that though I once had the same privilege, I had abused it so frightfully that it was withdrawn. So it doesn't behoove me to squawk about it, for after all, nobody ever used to throw me down and pour any liquor down my throat.

If you think you are an atheist, an agnostic, a skeptic, or have any other form of intellectual pride which keeps you from accepting what is in this book, I feel sorry for you. If you still think you are strong enough to beat the game alone, that is your affair. But if you really and truly want to quit drinking liquor for good and all, and sincerely feel that you must have some help, we know that we have an answer for you. It never fails if you go about it with one half the zeal you have been in the habit of showing when getting another drink.

Your Heavenly Father will never let you down!

194

THE UNBELIEVER

DULL . . . listless . . . semicomatose . . . I lay on my bed in a famous hospital for alcoholics. Death or worse had been my sentence.

What was the difference? What difference did anything make?

Why think of those things which were gone—why worry about the results of my drunken escapades? What the hell were the odds if my wife had discovered the mistress situation? Two swell boys . . . sure . . . but what difference would a corpse or an asylum imprisoned father make to them? . . . thoughts stop whirling in my head . . . that's the worst of this sobering-up process . . . the old think tank is geared in high-high . . . what do I mean high-high . . . where did that come from . . . oh yes, that first Cadillac I had, it had four speeds . . . had a high-high gear . . . insane asylum . . . how that bus could scamper . . . yes . . . even then liquor probably poisoned me. What had the little doctor said this morning . . . thoughts hesitate a moment . . . stop your mad turning . . . what was I thinking about . . . oh yes, the doctor.

This morning I reminded Doc this was my tenth visit. I had spent a couple of thousand dollars on these trips and those I had financed for the plastered play girls who also couldn't sober up. Jackie was a honey until she got plastered

and then she was a hellion. Wonder what gutter she's in now. Where was I? Oh . . . I asked

THE UNBELIEVER 195

the doctor to tell me the truth. He owed it to me for the amount of money I had spent. He faltered. Said I'd been drunk that's all. God! Didn't I know that?

But Doc, you're evading. Tell me honestly what is the matter with me. I'll be all right did you say? But Doc, you've said that before. You said once that if I stopped for a year I would be over the habit and would never drink again. I didn't drink for over a year, but I did start to drink again.

Tell me what is the matter with me. I'm an alcoholic? Ha ha and ho ho! As if I didn't know that! But aside from your fancy name for a plain drunk, tell me why I drink. You say a true alcoholic is something different from a plain drunk? What do you mean . . . let me have it cold . . . brief and with no trimmings.

An alcoholic is a person who has an allergy to alcohol? Is poisoned by it? One drink does something to the chemical make-up of the body? That drink effects the nerves and in a certain number of hours another drink is medically demanded? And so the vicious cycle is started? An ever smaller amount of time between drinks to stop those screaming, twitching, invisible wires called nerves?

I know that history Doc . . . how the spiral tightens . . . a drink . . . unconscious . . . awake . . . drink . . . unconscious . . . poured into the hospital . . . suffer the agonies of hell . . . the shakes . . . thoughts running wild . . . brain unleashed . . . engine without a governor. But hell Doc, I don't want to drink! I've got one of the stubbornest will powers known in business. I stick at things. I get them done. I've stuck

196 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

on the wagon for months. And not been bothered by it . . . and then suddenly, incomprehensibly, an empty glass in my hand and another spiral started. How did the Doc explain that one?

He couldn't. That was one of the mysteries of true alcoholism. A famous medical foundation had spent a fortune trying to segregate the reasons for the alcoholic as compared to the plain hard, heavy drinker. Had tried to find the cause. And all they had been able to determine as a fact was that the majority of the alcohol in every drink taken by the alcoholic went to the fluid in which the brain floated. Why a man every started when he knew those things was one of the things that could not be fathomed. Only the damn fool public believed it a matter of weak will power. Fear . . . ostracism . . . loss of family . . . loss of position . . . the gutter . . . nothing stopped the alcoholic.

Doc! What do you mean—nothing! What! An incurable disease? Doc, you're kidding me! You're trying to scare me into stopping! What's that you say? You wish you were? What are those tears in your eyes Doc? What's that? Forty years you've spent at this alcoholic business and you have yet to see a true alcoholic cured? Your life defeated and wasted? Oh, come, come Doc . . . what would some of us do without you? If even to only sober up. But Doc . . . let's have it. What is going to be my history from here on out? Some vital organ will stop or the mad house with a wet brain? How soon? Within two years? But, Doc, I've got to do something about it! I'll see doctors . . . I'll go to sanitariums. Surely the medical pro-

THE UNBELIEVER 197

fession knows something about it. So little, you say? But why? Messy. Yes, I'll admit there is nothing messier than an alcoholic drunk.

What's that Doc? You know a couple of fellows that were steady customers here that haven't been drunk for about ten months? You say they claim they are cured? And they make an avocation of passing it on to others? What have they got? You don't know . . . and you don't believe they are cured . . . well why tell me about it? A fine fellow you say, plenty of money, and you're sure it isn't a racket . . . just wants to be helpful . . . call him up for me will you, Doc?

How Doc had hated to tell me. Thoughts stop knocking at my door. Why can't I get drunk like other people, get up next morning, toss my head a couple of time and go to work? Why do I have to shake so I can't hold the razor? Why does every little muscle inside me have to feel like a crawling worm? Why do even my vocal cords quiver so words are gibberish until I've had a big drink? Poison! Of course! But how could anyone understand such a necessity for a drink that it has to be loaded with pepper to keep it from bouncing? Can any mortal understand such secret shame in having to have a drink as to make a person keep the bottles hidden all over the house. The morning drink . . . shame and necessity . . . weakness . . . remorse. But what do the family know about it? What do doctors know about it? Little Doc was right, they know nothing. They just say "Be strong"—"Don't take that drink"—"Suffer it through."

What the hell do they know about suffering? Not

198 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

sickness. Not a belly ache—oh yes, your guts get so sore that you cannot place your hands on them . . . oh sure, every time you go you twist and writhe in pain. What the hell does any non-alcoholic know about suffering? Thoughts . . . stop this mad merry-go-round. And worst of all this mental suffering—the hating yourself—the feeling of absurd, irrational weakness—the unworthiness. Out that window! Use the gun in the drawer! What about poison? Go out in a garage and start the car. Yeah, that's the way out . . . but then people'll say "He was plastered." I can't leave that story behind. That's worse than cowardly.

Isn't there some one who understands? Thoughts . . . please, oh please, stop . . . I'm going nuts . . . or am I nuts now? Never . . . never again will I take another drink, not even a glass of beer . . . even that starts it. Never . . . never . . . never again . . . and yet I've said that a dozen times and inexplicably I've found an empty glass in my hand and the whole story repeated.

My Lord, the tragedy that sprang out of her eyes when I came home with a breath on me . . . and fear. The smiles wiped off the kids' faces. Terror stalking through the house. Yes . . . that changed it from a home into a house. Not drunk yet, but they knew what was coming. Mr. Hyde was moving in.

And so I'm going to die. Or a wet brain. What was it that fellow said who was here this afternoon? Damn fool thought . . . get out of my mind. Now I know I'm going nuts. And science knows nothing about it. And psychiatrists. I've spent plenty on them. Thoughts,

THE UNBELIEVER 199

go away! No . . . I don't want to think about what that fellow said this afternoon.

He's trying . . . idealistic as hell . . . nice fellow, too.

Oh, why do I have to suffer with this revolving brain? Why can't I sleep? What was it he said? Oh yes, came in and told about his terrific drunks, his trips up here, this same thing I'm going through. Yes, he's an alcoholic all right. And then he told me he knew he was cured. Told me he was peaceful . . . (I'll never know peace again) . . . that he didn't carry constant fear around with him. Happy because he felt free. But it's screwy. He said so himself. But he did get my confidence when he started to tell what he had gone through. It was so exactly like my case. He knows what this torture is. He raised my hopes so high; it looked as though he had something. I don't know, I guess I was so sold that I expected him to spring some kind of a pill and I asked him desperately what it was.

And he said "God."

And I laughed.

A ball bat across my face would have been no greater shock. I was so high with hope and expectation. How can a man be so heartless? He said that it sounded screwy but it worked, at least it had with him . . . said he was not a religionist . . . in fact didn't go to church much . . . my ears came up at that . . . his unconventionality attracted me . . . said that some approaches to religion were screwy . . . talked about how the simplest truth in the world had been often all balled up by complicating it . . . that attracted me . . . get out of my mind . . . what a fine religious bird I'd

200 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

be . . . imagine the glee of the gang at me getting religion . . . phooey . . . thoughts, please slow down . . . why don't they give me something to go to sleep . . . lie down in green pastures . . . the guy's nuts . . . forget him.

And so it's the mad house for me . . . glad mother is dead, she won't have to suffer that . . . if I'm going nuts maybe it'd be better to be crazy the way he is . . . at least the kids wouldn't have the insane father whisper to carry through life . . . life's cruel . . . the puny minded, certain hiding gossips . . . "didn't you know his father was committed for insanity?" "What a sly label that would be to hang on those boys . . . damn the gossiping, reputationshredding, busybodies who put their noses into other people's business.

He'd laid in this same dump . . . suffered . . . gone through hell . . . made up his mind to get well . . . studied alcoholism . . . Jung . . . Blank Medical Foundation . . . asylums . . . Hopkins . . . many said incurable disease . . . impossible . . . nearly all known cures had been through religion . . . revolted him . . . made a study of religion . . . more he studied the more it was bunk to him . . . not understandable . . . self-hypnotism . . . and then the thought hit him that people had it all twisted up. They were trying to pour everyone into moulds, put a tag on them, tell them what they had to do and how they had to do it, for the salvation of their own souls. When as a matter of fact people were through worrying about their souls, they wanted action right here and now. A lot of tripe was

THE UNBELIEVER 201

usually built up around the simplest and most beautiful ideas in the world.

And how did he put the idea . . . bunk . . . bunk . . . why in hell am I still thinking about him . . . in hell . . . that's good . . . I am in hell. He said: "I came to the conclusion that there is SOMETHING. I know not what it is, but it is bigger than I. If I will acknowledge It, if I will humble myself, if I will give in

and bow in submission to that SOMETHING and then try to lead a life as fully in accord with my idea of good as possible, I will be in tune." And later the word good contracted in his mind to God.

But mister, I can't see any guy with long white whiskers up there just waiting for me to make a plea . . . and what did he answer . . . said I was trying to complicate it . . . why did I insist on making It human . . . all I had to do was believe in some power greater than myself and knuckle down to It . . . and I said maybe, but tell me mister why are you wasting your time up here? Don't hand me any bunk about it being more blessed to give than to receive . . . asked him what this thing cost and he laughed. He said it wasn't a waste of time . . . in doping it out he had thought of something somebody had said. A person never knew a lesson until he tried to pass it on to someone else. And that he had found out every time he tried to pass this on It became more vivid to him. So if we wanted to get hard boiled about it, he owed me, I didn't owe him. That's a new slant . . . the guy's crazy as a loon . . . get away from him brain . . . picture me going around telling other

202 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

people how to run their lives . . . if I could only go to sleep . . . that sedative doesn't seem to take hold.

He could visualize a great fellowship of us . . . quietly passing this from alcoholic to alcoholic . . . nothing organized . . . not ministers . . . not missionaries . . . what a story . . . thought we'd have to do it to get well . . . some kind of a miracle had happened in his life . . . common sense guy at that . . . his plan does fire the imagination.

Told him it sounded like self hypnosis to me and he said what of it . . . didn't care if it was yogi-ism, selfhypnotism, or anything else . . . four of them were well. But it's so damn hypocritical . . . I get beat every other way and then I turn around and lay it in God's lap . . . damned if I ever would turn to God . . . what a low-down, cowardly, despicable trick that would be . . . don't believe in God anyway . . . just a lot of hokey to keep the masses in subjugation . . . world's worst inquisitions have been practiced in His name . . . and he said . . . do I have to turn into an inquisitionist . . . if I don't knuckle down, I die . . . why the low-down missionary . . . what a bastardly screw to put on a person . . . a witch burner, that's what he is . . . the hell with him and all his damn theories. . . witch burner.

Sleep, please come to my door . . . that last was the eight hundred and eighty-fifth sheep over the fence . . . guess I'll put in some black ones . . . sheep . . . shepherds . . . wise men . . . what was that story . . . hell there I go back on that same line . . . told him I couldn't understand and I couldn't believe anything

THE UNBELIEVER 203

I couldn't understand. He said he supposed then that I didn't use electricity. No one actually understood where it came from or what it was. Nuts to him. He's got too many answers. What did he think the nub of the whole thing was? Subjugate self to some power above . . . ask for help . . . mean it . . . try to pass it on. Asked him what he was going to name this? Said it would be fatal to give it any kind of a tag . . . to have any sort of formality.

I'm going nuts . . . tried to get him into an argument about miracles . . . about Immaculate Conception . . . about stars leading three wise men . . . Jonah and the whale. He wanted to know what difference those things made . . . he didn't

even bother his head about them . . . if he did, he would get tight again. So I asked him what he thought about the Bible. Said he read it, and used those things he understood. He didn't take the Bible literally as an instruction book, for there was no nonsense you could not make out of it that way.

Thought I had him when I asked about the past sins I had committed. Guess I've done everything in the book . . . I supposed I would have to adopt the attitude that all was forgiven . . . here I am pure and clean as the driven snow . . . or else I was to go through life flogging myself mentally . . . bah. But he had the answer for that one too. Said he couldn't call back the hellish things he had done, but he figured life might be a ledger page. If he did a little good here and there, maybe the score would be evened up some day. On the other hand, if he continued as he had been going there

204 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

would be nothing but debit items on the sheet. Kind of common sense.

This is ridiculous . . . have I lost all power of logic . . . would I fall for all that religious line . . . let's see if I can't get to thinking straight . . . that's it . . . I'm trying to do too much thinking . . . just calm myself . . . quietly . . . quiet now . . . relax every muscle . . . start at the toes and move up . . . insane . . . wet brain . . . those boys . . . what a mess my life is . . . mistress . . . how I hate her . . . ah . . . I know what's the matter . . . that fellow gave me an emotional upset . . . I'll list every reason I couldn't accept his way of thinking. After laughing at this religious stuff all these years I'd be a hypocrite. That's one. Second, if there was a God, why all this suffering? Wait a minute, he said that was one of the troubles, we tried to give God some form. Make It just a Power that will help. Third, it sounds like the Salvation Army. Told him that and he said he was not going around singing on any street corners but nevertheless the Salvation Army did a great work. Simply, if he heard of a guy suffering the torments, he told him his story and belief.

There I go thinking again . . . just started to get calmed down . . . sleep . . . boys . . . insane . . . death . . . mistress . . . life all messed up . . . business. Now listen, take hold . . . what am I going to do? NEVER . . . that's final and in caps. Never . . . that's net no discount. Never . . . never . . . and my mind is made up. NEVER am I going to be such a cowardly low down dog as to acknowledge God. The two faced, gossipping Babbitts can go around with

THE UNBELIEVER 205

their sanctimonious mouthings, their miserable worshipping, their Bible quotations, their holier-than-thou attitudes, their nicey-nice, Sunday-worshipping, Monday-robbing actions, but never will they find me acknowledging God . Let me laugh. . . I'd like to shriek with insane glee . . . my mind's made up . . . insane, there it is again.

Brrr, this floor is cold on my knees . . . why are the tears running like a river down my cheeks . . . God, have mercy on my soul!

THE EUROPEAN DRINKER

I WAS born in Europe, in Alsace to be exact, shortly after it had become German and practically grew up with "good Rhine wine" of song and story. My parents had some vague ideas of making a priest out of me and for some

years I attended the Franciscan school at Basal, Switzerland, just across the border, about six miles from my home. But, although I was a good Catholic, the monastic life had little appeal for me.

Very early I became apprenticed to harness-making and acquired considerable knowledge of upholstering. My daily consumption of wine was about a quart, but that was common where I lived. Everybody drank wine. And it is true that there was no great amount of drunkenness. But I can remember, in my teens, that there were a few characters who caused the village heads to nod pityingly and sometimes in anger as they paused to say, "That sot, Henri" and "Ce pauvre Jules," who drank too much. They were undoubtedly the alcoholics of our village.

Military service was compulsory and I did my stretch with the class of my age, goose-stepping in German barracks and taking part in the Boxer Rebellion in China, my first time at any great distance from home. In foreign parts many a soldier who has been abstemious at home learns to use new and potent drinks. So I indulged with my comrades in everything the Far East had to

THE EUROPEAN DRINKER 207

offer. I cannot say, however, that I acquired any craving for hard liquor as a result. When I got back to Germany I settled down to finish my apprenticeship, drinking the wine of the country as usual.

Many friends of my family had emigrated to America, so at 24 I decided that the United States offered me the opportunity I was never likely to find in my native land. I came directly to a growing industrial city in the middle west, where I have lived practically ever since. I was warmly welcomed by friends of my youth who had preceded me. For weeks after my arrival I was feted and entertained in the already large colony of Alsatians in the city, among the Germans in their saloons and clubs. I early decided that the wine of America was very inferior stuff and took up beer instead.

I soon found work at my trade in harness-making. It was still an age of horses. But I discovered that harness and saddle-making in America was different than anything I had known. Every man in the shop was a specialist and instead of having a variety of jobs to do every day, I was compelled to sit all day long at a bench doing the same thing endlessly. I found it very monotonous and, wanting a change, I found it when I got work as an upholsterer in a large furniture store.

Fond of singing, I joined a German singing society which had good club headquarters. There I sat in the evenings, enjoying with my friends our memories of the "old country," singing the old songs we all knew, playing simple card games for drinks and consuming great quantities of beer.

At that time I could go into any saloon, have one or

208 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

two beers, walk out and forget about it. I had no desire whatever to sit down at a table and stay a whole morning or afternoon drinking. Certainly at that time I was one of those who "can take it or leave it alone." There had never been any drunkards in my family. I came of good stock, of men and women who drank wine all their lives as a beverage, and while they occasionally got drunk at special celebrations, they were up and about their business the next day.

Prohibition came. Having regard for the law of the land, I resigned myself to the will of the national legislators and quit drinking altogether, not because I

had found it harmful, but because I couldn't get what I was accustomed to drink. You can all remember that in the first few months after the change, a great many men, who had formerly been used to a few beers every day or an occasional drink of whiskey, simply quit all alcoholic drinks. For the great majority of us, however, that condition didn't last. We saw very early that prohibition wasn't going to work. It wasn't very long before home-brewing was an institution and men began to search feverishly for old recipe books on wine making.

But I hardly tasted anything for two years and started in business for myself, founding a mattress factory which is today an important industrial enterprise in our city. I was doing very well with that and general upholstering work, and there was every indication that I would be financially independent by the time I reached middle age. By this time I was married and was paying for a home. Like most immigrants I wanted to be some-

THE EUROPEAN DRINKER 209

body and have something and I was very happy and contented as I felt success crown my efforts. I missed the old social times, of course, but had no definite craving even for beer.

Successful home-brewers among my friends began to invite me to their homes. I decided that if these fellows could make it I would try it myself and so I did. It wasn't very long until I had developed a pretty good brew with uniformity and plenty of authority. I knew the stuff I was making was a lot stronger than I had been used to, but never suspected that steady drinking of it might develop a taste for something even stronger.

It wasn't long before the bootlegger was an established institution in this, as in other towns. I was doing well in business and in going around town I was frequently invited to have a drink in a speakeasy. I condoned my domestic brewing and the bootleggers and their business. More and more I formed the habit of doing some of my business in the speakeasy and after a time did not need that as an excuse. The "speaks" usually sold whiskey. Beer was too bulky and it couldn't be kept in a jug under the counter ready to be dumped when John Law would come around. I was now forming an entirely new drinking technique. Before long I had a definite taste for hard liquor, knew nausea and headaches I had never known before, but as in the old days, I suffered them out. Gradually, however, I'd suffer so much that I simply had to have the morning-after drink.

I became what is called a periodical drinker. I was eased out of the business I had founded and was reduced

210 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

to doing general upholstery in a small shop at the back of my house. My wife upbraided me often and plenty when she saw that my "periodicals" were gradually losing me what business I could get. I began to bring bottles in. I had them hidden away in the house and all over my shop in careful concealment. I had all the usual experiences of the alcoholic for I was certainly one by this time. Sometimes, after sobering up after a bout of several weeks, I would righteously resolve to quit. With a great deal of determination, I would throw out full pints—pour them out and smash the bottles—firmly resolved never to take another drink of the stuff. I was going to straighten up.

In four or five days I would be hunting all over the place, at home and in my workshop for the bottles I had destroyed, cursing myself for being a damned fool. My "periodicals" became more frequent until I reached the point where I wanted to devote all my time to drinking, working as little as possible and then only when the necessity of my family demanded it. As soon as I had satisfied that, what I earned as an upholsterer went for liquor. I would promise to have jobs done and never do them. My customers lost confidence in me to the point where I retained what business I had only because I was a well-trained and reputedly fine craftsman. "Best in the business, when he's sober," my customers would say and I still had a following who would give me work though they deplored my habits because they knew the job would be well done when they eventually got it.

I had always been a good Catholic, possibly not so devoted as I should have been, but fairly regular in my

THE EUROPEAN DRINKER 211

attendance at services. I had never doubted the existence of the Supreme Being but now I began to absent myself from my church where I had formerly been a member of the choir. Unfortunately, I had no desire to consult my priest about my drinking. In fact I was scared to talk to him about it, for I feared the kind of talk he would give me. Unlike many other Catholics who frequently take pledges for definite periods—a year, two years or for good, I never had any desire to "take a pledge" before the priest. And yet, realizing at last that liquor really had me, I wanted to quit. My wife wrote away for advertised cures for the liquor habit and gave them to me in coffee. I even got them myself and tried them. None of the various cures of this kind were any good.

My experiences differ very little from the experiences of other alcoholics but if ever a man was firmly in the grip of a power that could lead only to ruin and disgrace, I was that man.

I had the usual array of friends who tried to stop me in my drinking career. I can hear them yet. Kindly for the most part, yet blind and almost wholly without understanding, they had the approach that every alcoholic knows:

"Can't you be a man?"

"You can cut it out."

"You've got a good wife; you could have the best business in town. What's the matter with you anyway?"

Every alcoholic has heard those familiar phrases from well-meaning friends. And they were my friends, too. In their way they did what they could, helped me at

212 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

different times to get on my feet after a particularly bad time, aided me in unraveling my tangled business affairs, suggested this and suggested that. They all wanted to help me. But none of them knew how. Not one of them had the answer I wanted.

My wife got talking to a local merchant one day. He was known as a deeply religious man. He was undoubtedly a fundamentalist with strong leanings toward evangelistic preaching. He knew me and something of my reputation. My wife asked him to help her if he could. So he came to see me, bringing a friend along. He found me drunk and in bed. This man had never been an alcoholic and his approach to me was the familiar one of the emotional seeker

after souls. Well, there I was, lying in an alcoholic stupor with occasional flashes of emotional self-pity, in pretty much the same condition as the drunk who plunges to the sawdust at the appeal of a religious orator.

Good, honest and sincere man, he prayed at my bed-side and I promised to go to church with him to hear an evangelist. He didn't wait for me to come to his office, he came after me.

I heard the evangelist but was not impressed. The service was entirely foreign to what I had been accustomed to in my religious observance since childhood. I have no doubt of the preacher's sincerity and seek not at all to belittle his work, but I was unaffected. So I got no answer.

There are alcoholics who have been without any consciousness of God all their lives; there are some who are actual haters of the idea of a Supreme Being; there are others, like myself, who have never given up a belief in

THE EUROPEAN DRINKER 213

the Almighty, but who have always felt that God is far off. And that's the way I felt. I had a closer sense of God during the mass at church, a feeling of His presence, but in everyday life He seemed to be at a distance from me and more as a righteous judge, than an all-wise, pitying Father to the human race.

Then occurred the event that saved me. An alcoholic came to see me who is a doctor. He didn't talk like a preacher at all. In fact his language was perfectly suited to my understanding. He had no desire to know anything except whether I was definite about my desire to quit drinking. I told him with all the sincerity at my command that I did. Even then he went into no great detail about how he and a crowd of alcoholics, with whom he associated, had mastered their difficulty. Instead he told me that some of them wanted to talk to me and would be over to see me.

This doctor had imparted his knowledge to just a few other men at that time—not more than four or five—they now number more than seventy persons. And, because as I have discovered since, it is part of the "treatment" that these men be sent to see and talk with alcoholics who want to quit, he kept them busy. He had already imbued them with his own spirit until they were ready and willing at all times to go where sent, and as a doctor he well knew that this mission and duty would strengthen them as it later helped me. The visits from these men impressed me at once. Where preaching and prayers had touched me very little, I was immediately impressed with desire for further knowledge of these men.

214 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

"There must be something to it," I said to myself. "Why would these busy men take the time to come to see me? They understand my problem. Like me, they've tried this remedy and that remedy but never found one that worked. But whatever it is they are using now, it seems to keep them sober."

Certainly I could see they were sober. The third man who came to see me had been one of the greatest business-getters his company had ever employed. From the top of the heap in a few years he had skidded to becoming a shuffling customer, still entering the better barrooms but welcomed by neither mine host nor his patrons. His own business was practically gone, he told me, when he discovered the answer.

"You've been trying man's ways and they always fail," he told me. "You can't win unless you try God's way."

I had never heard of the remedy expressed in just this language. In a few sentences he made God seem personal to me, explained Him as a being who was interested in me, the alcoholic, and that all I needed to do was to be willing to follow His way for me; that as long as I followed it I would be able to overcome my desire for liquor.

Well, there I was, willing to try it, but I didn't know how, except in a vague way. I knew somehow that it meant more than just going to church and living a moral life. If that was all, then I was a little doubtful that it was the answer I was looking for.

He went on talking and told me that he had found the plan has a basis of love and the practice of Christ's

THE EUROPEAN DRINKER 215

injunction, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Taking that as a foundation, he reasoned that if a man followed that rule he could not be selfish. I could see that. And he further said that God could not accept me as a sincere follower of His Divine Law unless I was ready to be thoroughly honest about it.

That was perfectly logical. My church taught that. I had always known that in theory. We talked, too, about personal morals. Every man has his problem of this kind but we didn't discuss it very much. My visitor well knew, that as I tried to follow God I would get to studying these things out for myself.

We talked things over a long time. I saw readily that I couldn't afford to quibble. I already believed in God, had always done so. Was ready to give my will to Him. That's what it came to.

That day I gave my will to God and asked to be directed. But I have never thought of that as something to do and then forget about. I very early came to see that there had to be a continual renewal of that simple deal with God; that I had perpetually to keep the bargain. So I began to pray; to place my problems in God's hands.

For a long time I kept on trying, in a pretty dumb way at first, I know, but very earnestly. I didn't want to be a fake. And I began putting in practice what I was learning every day. It wasn't very long until my doctor friend sent me to tell another alcoholic what my experience had been. This duty together with my weekly meetings with my fellow alcoholics and my

216 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

daily renewal of the contract I originally made with God have kept me sober when nothing else ever did.

I have been sober for three years now. The first few months were hard. Many things happened; business trials, little worries, and feelings of general despondency came near driving me to the bottle, but I made progress. As I go along I seem to get strength daily to be able to resist more easily. And when I get upset, cross-grained and out of tune with my fellow man I know that I am out of tune with God. Searching where I have been at fault, it is not hard to discover and get right again, for I have proven to myself and to many others who know me that God can keep a man sober if he will let Him.

Being a Catholic, it is natural that I should attend my own church which I do regularly. I partake of its sacraments which have a new and deeper meaning to me now. I realize what it is to be in the presence of God right in my own home and I realize it deeply when I am at church. For when a man is truly trying to

do God's will, instead of his own, he is very conscious of being in the presence of God always, wherever he may be.

A FEMININE VICTORY

TO MY lot falls the rather doubtful distinction of being the only "lady" alcoholic in our particular section. Perhaps it is because of a desire for a "supporting cast" of my own sex that I am praying for inspiration to tell my story in a manner that may give other women who have this problem the courage to see it in its true light and seek the help that has given me a new lease on life.

When the idea was first presented to me that I was an alcoholic, my mind simply refused to accept it. Horrors! How disgraceful! What humiliation! How preposterous! Why, I loathed the taste of liquor—drinking was simply a means of escape when my sorrows became too great for me to endure. Even after it had been explained to me that alcoholism is a disease, I could not realize that I had it. I was still ashamed, still wanted to hide behind the screen of reasons made up of "unjust treatment," "unhappiness," "tired and dejected," and the dozens of other things that I thought lay at the root of my search for oblivion by means of whiskey or gin.

In any case, I felt quite sure that I was not an alcoholic. However, since I have faced the fact, and it surely is a fact, I have been able to use the help that is so freely given when we learn how to be really truthful with ourselves.

218 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

The path by which I have come to this blessed help was long and devious. It led through the mazes and perplexities of an unhappy marriage and divorce, and a dark time of separation from my grown children, and a readjustment of life at an age when most women feel pretty sure of a home and security.

But I have reached the source of help. I have learned to recognize and acknowledge the underlying cause of my disease; selfishness, self-pity and resentment. A few short months ago those three words applied to me would have aroused as much indignation in my heart as the word alcoholic. The ability to accept them as my own has been derived from trying, with the un-ending help of God, to live with certain goals in mind.

Coming to the grim fact of alcoholism, I wish I could present the awful reality of its insidiousness in such a way that no one could ever again fail to recognize the comfortable, easy steps that lead down to the edge of the precipice, and show how those steps suddenly disappeared when the great gulf yawned before me. I couldn't possibly turn and get back to solid earth again that way.

The first step is called—"The first drink in the morning to pull you out of a hangover."

I remember so well when I got onto that step—I had been drinking just like most of the young married crowd I knew. For a couple of years it went on, at parties and at "speakeasies," as they were then called, and with cocktails after matinees. Just going the rounds and having a good time.

Then came the morning when I had my first case of

A FEMININE VICTORY 219

jitters. Someone suggested a little of the "hair of the dog that bit me." A half hour after that drink I was sitting on top of the world, thinking how simple it was to cure shaky nerves. How wonderful liquor was, in only a few minutes

my head had stopped aching, my spirits were back to normal and all was well in this very fine world.

Unfortunately, there was a catch to it—I was an alcoholic. As time went on the one drink in the morning had to be taken a little earlier—it had to be followed by a second one in an hour or so, before I really felt equal to getting on with the business of living.

Gradually I found at parties the service was a little slow; the rest of the crowd being pretty happy and carefree after the second round. My reaction was inclined to be just the opposite. Something had to be done about that so I'd just help myself to a fast one, sometimes openly, but as time went on and my need became more acute, I often did it on the quiet.

In the meantime, the morning-after treatment was developing into something quite stupendous. The eye-openers were becoming earlier, bigger, more frequent, and suddenly, it was lunch time! Perhaps there was a plan for the afternoon—a bridge or tea, or just callers. My breath had to be accounted for, so along came such alibis as a touch of grippe or some other ailment for which I'd just taken a hot whiskey and lemon. Or "someone" had been in for lunch and we had just had a couple of cocktails. Then came the period of brazening it out—going to social gatherings well fortified against the jitters; next the phone call in the morning

220 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

—"Terribly sorry that I can't make it this afternoon, I have an awful headache"; then simply forgetting that there were engagements at all; spending two or three days drinking, sleeping it off, and waking to start all over again.

Of course, I had the well known excuses; my husband was failing to come home for dinner or hadn't been home for several days; he was spending money which was needed to pay bills; he had always been a drinker; I had never known anything about it until I was almost thirty years old and he gave me my first drink. Oh, I had them all down, letter perfect—all the excuses, reasons and justifications. What I did not know was that I was being destroyed by selfishness, self-pity and resentment. There were the swearing-off periods and the "goings on the wagon"—they would last anywhere from two weeks to three or four months. Once, after a very severe illness of six weeks' duration (caused by drinking), I didn't touch anything of an alcoholic nature for almost a year. I thought I had it licked that time, but all of a sudden things were worse than ever. I found fear had no effect.

Next came the hospitalization, not a regular sanitarium, but a local hospital where my doctor would ship me when I'd get where I had to call him in. That poor man—I wish he could read this for he would know then it was no fault of his I wasn't cured.

When I was divorced I thought the cause had been removed. I felt that being away from what I had considered injustice and ill-treatment would solve the prob-

A FEMININE VICTORY 221

lem of my unhappiness. In a little over a year I was in the alcoholic ward of a public hospital!

It was there that L—— came to me. I had known her very slightly ten years before. My ex-husband brought her to me hoping that she could help. She did. From the hospital I went home with her.

There, her husband told me the secret of his rebirth. It is not really a secret at all, but something free and open to all of us. He asked me if I believed in God or some power greater than myself. Well, I did believe in God, but at that time I hadn't any idea what He is. As a child I had been taught my "Now I lay me's" and "Our Father which art in Heaven." I had been sent to Sunday School and taken to church. I had been baptized and confirmed. I had been taught to realize there is a God and to "love" him. But though I had been taught all these things, I had never learned them.

When B—— (L's husband) began to talk about God, I felt pretty low in my mind. I thought God was something that I, and lots of other people like me, had to worry along without. Yet I had always had the "prayer habit." In fact I used to say in my mind "Now, if God answers this prayer, I'll know there is a God." It was a great system, only somehow it didn't seem to work!

Finally B—— put it to me this way: "You admit you've made a mess of things trying to run them your way, are you willing to give up? Are you willing to say: "Here it is God, all mixed up. I don't know how to un-mix it, I'll leave it to you." Well, I couldn't quite do that. I wasn't feeling very well, and I was

222 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

afraid that later when the fog wore off, I'd want to back out. So we let it rest a few days. L and B sent me to stay with some friends of theirs out of town—I'd never seen them before. The man of that house, P—— had given up drinking three months before. After I had been there a few days, I saw that P—— and his wife had something that made them mighty hopeful and happy. But I got a little uneasy going into a perfect stranger's home and staying day after day. I said this to P——and his reply was: "Why, you don't know how much it is helping me to have you here." Was that a surprise! Always before that when I was recovering from a tailspin I'd been just a pain in the neck to everyone. So, I began to sense in a small way just what these spiritual principles were all about.

Finally I very self-consciously and briefly asked God to show me how to do what He wanted me to do. My prayer was just about as weak and helpless a thing as one could imagine, but it taught me how to open my mouth and pray earnestly and sincerely. However, I had not quite made the grade. I was full of fears, shames, and other "bug-a-boos" and two weeks later an incident occurred that put me on the toboggan again. I seemed to feel that the hurt of that incident was too great to endure without some "release." So I forsook Spirit in favor of "spirits" and that evening I was well on the way to a long session with my old enemy "liquor." I begged the person in whose home I was living not to let anyone know, but she, having good sense, got in touch right away with those who had

A FEMININE VICTORY 223

helped me before and very shortly they had rallied round.

I was eased out of the mess and in a day or two I had a long talk with one of the crowd. I dragged out all my sins of commission and omission, I told everything I could think of that might be the cause of creating a fear situation, a remorse situation, or a shame situation. It was pretty terrible, I thought then, to lay myself bare that way, but I know now that such is the first step away from the edge of the precipice.

Things went very well for quite a while, then came a dull rainy day. I was alone. The weather and my self-pity began to cook up a nice dish of the blues

for me. There was liquor in the house and I found myself suggesting to myself "Just one drink will make me feel so much more cheerful." Well, I got the Bible and "Victorious Living" and sitting down in full view of the bottle of whiskey, I commenced to read. I also prayed. But I didn't say "I must not take that drink because I owe it to so and so not to." I didn't say "I won't take that drink because I'm strong enough to resist temptation." I didn't say "I must not" or "I will not" at all. I simply prayed and read and in half an hour I got up and was absolutely free of the urge for a drink.

It might be very grand to be able to say "Finis" right here, but I see now I hadn't gone all the way I was intended to go. I was still coddling and nursing my two pets, self-pity and resentment. Naturally, I came a cropper once more. This time I went to the telephone (after I had taken about two drinks) and called L to

224 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

tell her what I had done. She asked me to promise that I would not take another drink before someone came to me. Well, I had learned enough about truthfulness to refuse to give that promise. Had I been living after the old pattern, I would have been ashamed to call for help. In fact I should not have wanted help. I should have tried to hide the fact that I was drinking and continued until I again wound up behind the "eight ball." I was taken back to B's home where I stayed for three weeks. The drinking ended the morning after I got there, but the suffering continued for some time. I felt desperate and I questioned my ability to really avail myself of the help that the others had received and applied so successfully. Gradually, however, God began to clear my channels so that real understanding began to come. Then was the time when full realization and acknowledgement came to me. It was realization and acknowledgement of the fact that I was full of self-pity and resentment, realization of the fact that I had not fully given my problems to God. I was still trying to do my own fixing.

That was more than a year ago. Since then, although circumstances are no different, for there are still trials and hardships and hurts and disappointments and disillusionments, self-pity and resentment are being eliminated. In this past year I haven't been tempted once. I have no more idea of taking a drink to aid me through a difficult period than I would if I had never drunk. But I know absolutely that the minute I close my channels with sorrow for myself, or being hurt by, or resentful toward anyone, I am in horrible danger.

A FEMININE VICTORY 225

I know that my victory is none of my human doing. I know that I must keep myself worthy of Divine help. And the glorious thing is this: I am free, I am happy, and perhaps I am going to have the blessed opportunity of "passing it on." I say in all reverence—Amen.

226

OUR SOUTHERN FRIEND

TWO rosy-cheeked children stand at the top of a long hill as the glow of the winter sunset lights up the snow covered country-side. "It's time to go home" says my sister. She is the eldest. After one more exhilarating trip on the sled, we plod homeward through the deep snow. The light from an oil lamp shines

from an upstairs window of our home. We stamp the snow from our boots and rush in to the warmth of the coal stove which is supposed to heat up-stairs as well. "Hello dearies," calls Mother from above, "get your wet things off."

"Where's Father?" I ask, having gotten a whiff of sausage cooking through the kitchen door and thinking of supper.

"He went down to the swamp," replies Mother. "He should be home soon."

Father is an Episcopal minister and his work takes him over long drives on bad roads. His parishioners are limited in number, but his friends are many, for to him race, creed, or social position make no difference. It is not long before he drives up in the old buggy. Both he and old Maud are glad to get home. The drive was long and cold but he was thankful for the hot bricks which some thoughtful person had given him for his feet. Soon supper is on the table. Father says grace,

OUR SOUTHERN FRIEND 227

which delays my attack on the buckwheat cakes and sausage. What an appetite!

A big setter lies asleep near the stove. He begins to make queer sounds and his feet twitch. What is he after in his dreams? More cakes and sausage. At last I am filled. Father goes to his study to write some letters. Mother plays the piano and we sing. Father finishes his letters and we all join in several exciting games of parchesi. Then Father is persuaded to read aloud some more of "The Rose and the Ring."

Bedtime comes. I climb to my room in the attic. It is cold so there is no delay. I crawl under a pile of blankets and blow out the candle. The wind is rising and howls around the house. But I am safe and warm. I fall into a dreamless sleep.

I am in church. Father is delivering his sermon. A wasp is crawling up the back of the lady in front of me. I wonder if it will reach her neck. Shucks! It has flown away. Ho, hum, maybe the watermelons are ripe in Mr. Jones patch. That's an idea! Benny will know, but Mr. Jones will not know what happened to some of them, if they are. At last! The message has been delivered.

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works—" I hunt for my nickel to drop in the plate so that mine will be seen.

Father comes forward in the chancel of the church. "The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds—" Hurray! Just a hymn and then church will be over until next week!

228 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

I am in another fellow's room at college. "Freshman," said he to me, "do you ever take a drink?" I hesitated. Father had never directly spoken to me about drinking and he never drank any, so far as I knew. Mother hated liquor and feared a drunken man. Her brother had been a drinker and had died in a state hospital for the insane. But his life was unmentionable, so far as I was concerned. I had never had a drink but I had seen enough merriment in the boys who were drinking to be interested. I would never be like the village drunkard at home. How a lot of people despised him! Just a weakling!

"Well," said the older boy, "Do you?"

"Once in a while," I lied. I could not let him think I was a sissy.

He poured out two drinks. "Here's looking at you," said he.

I gulped it down and choked. I didn't like it, but I would not say so. No, never! A mellow glow stole over me. Say!

This wasn't so bad after all. In fact, it was darn good. Sure I'd have another. The glow increased. Other boys came in. My tongue loosened. Everyone laughed loudly. I was witty. I had no inferiorities. Why, I wasn't even ashamed of my skinny legs! This was the real thing!

A haze filled the room. The electric light began to move. Then two bulbs appeared. The faces of the other boys grew dim. How sick I felt. I staggered to the bathroom—. Shouldn't have drunk so much or so fast. But I knew how to handle it now. I'd drink like a gentleman after this.

And so I met John Barleycorn. The grand fellow

OUR SOUTHERN FRIEND 229

who at my call made me "a hale fellow, well met," who gave me such a fine voice, as we sang "Hail, hail, the gang's all here," and "Sweet Adeline," who gave me freedom from fear and feelings of inferiority. Good old John! He was my pal, all right.

Final exams of my senior year and I may somehow graduate. I would never have tried, but Mother counts on it so. A case of measles saved me from being kicked out during my Sophomore year. Bells, bells, bells! Class, library, laboratory! Am I tired!

But the end is in sight. My last exam and an easy one. I gaze at the board with its questions. Can't remember the answer to the first. I'll try the second. No soap there. Say this is getting serious! I don't seem to remember anything. I concentrate on one of the questions. I don't seem to be able to keep my mind on what I am doing. I get uneasy. If I don't get started soon, I won't have time to finish. No use. I can't think.

Oh! An idea! I leave the room, which the honor system allows. I go to my room. I pour out half a tumbler of grain alcohol and fill it with ginger ale. Oh, boy! Now back to the exam. My pen moves rapidly. I know enough of the answers to get by. Good old John Barleycorn! He can certainly be depended on. What a wonderful power he has over the mind! He has given me my diploma!

Underweight! How I hate that word. Three attempts to enlist in the service, and three failures because of being skinny. True, I have recently recovered from

230 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

pneumonia and have an alibi, but my friends are in the war, or going, and I am not. To hell with it all! I visit a friend who is awaiting orders. The atmosphere of "eat, drink, and be merry" prevails and I absorb it. I drink a lot every night. I can hold a lot now, more than the others.

I am examined for the draft and pass the physical exam. What a dirty deal! Drafted! The shame of it. I am to go to camp on November 13th. The Armistice is signed on the 11th and the draft is called off. Never in the service! The war leaves me with a pair of blankets, a toilet kit, a sweater knit by my sister, and a still greater inferiority.

It is ten o'clock of a Saturday night. I am working hard on the books of a subsidiary company of a large corporation. I have had experience in selling, collecting, and accounting, and am on my way up the ladder.

Then the crack-up. Cotton struck the skids and collections went cold. A twenty three million dollar surplus wiped out. Offices closed up and workers discharged. I, and the books of my division have been transferred to the head office. I have

no assistance and am working nights, Saturdays and Sundays. My salary has been cut. My wife and new baby are fortunately staying with relatives. What a life! I feel exhausted. The doctor has told me that if I don't give up inside work, I'll have tuberculosis. But what am I to do? I have a family to support and have no time to be looking for another job.

OUR SOUTHERN FRIEND 231

Oh, well. I reach for the bottle which I just got from George, the elevator boy.

I am a traveling salesman. The day is over and business has been not so good. I'll go to bed. I wish I were home with the family and not in this dingy hotel.

Well—well—look who's here! Good old Charlie! It's great to see him. How's the boy? A drink? You bet your life! We buy a gallon of "corn" because it is so cheap. Yet I am fairly steady when I go to bed.

Morning comes. I feel horribly. A little drink will put me on my feet. But it takes others to keep me there.

I see some prospects. I am too miserable to care if they give me an order or not. My breath would knock out a mule, I learn from a friend. Back at the hotel and more to drink. I come to early in the morning. My mind is fairly clear, but inwardly I am undergoing torture. My nerves are screaming in agony. I go to the drug store and it is not open. I wait. Minutes are interminable. Will the store never open? At last! I hurry in. The druggist fixes me up a bromide. I go back to the hotel and lie down. I wait. I am going crazy. The bromides have no effect. I get a doctor. He gives me a hypodermic. Blessed peace!

And I blame this experience on the quality of the liquor.

I am a real estate salesman. "What is the price of that house," I ask the head of the firm I work for. He names me a price. Then he says, "That is what the builders

232 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

are asking, but we will add on \$500.00 and split it, if you can close the deal." The prospect signs the contract for the full amount. My boss buys the property and sells to the prospect. I get my commission and \$250.00 extra and everything is Jake. But is it? Something is sour. So let's have a drink!

I become a teacher in a boy's school. I am happy in my work.

I like the boys and we have lots of fun, in class and out.

An unhappy mother comes to me about her boy, for she knows I am fond of him. They expected him to get high marks and he has not the ability to do it. So he altered his report card through fear of his father. And his dishonesty has been discovered. Why are there so many foolish parents, and why is there so much unhappiness in these homes?

The doctors bills are heavy and the bank account is low. My wife's parents come to our assistance. I am filled with hurt pride and self-pity. I seem to get no sympathy for my illness and have no appreciation of the love behind the gift.

I call the boot-legger and fill up my charred keg. But I do not wait for the charred keg to work. I get drunk. My wife is extremely unhappy. Her father comes to sit with me. He never says an unkind word. He is a real friend but I do not appreciate him.

We are staying with my wife's father. Her mother is in critical condition at a hospital. The wind is moaning in the pine trees. I cannot sleep. I must get myself

OUR SOUTHERN FRIEND 233

together. I sneak down stairs and get a bottle of whiskey from the cellaret. I pour drinks down my throat. My father-in-law appears. "Have a drink?" I ask. He makes no reply, and hardly seems to see me. His wife dies that night.

Mother has been dying of cancer for a long time. She is near the end and now in a hospital. I have been drinking a lot, but never get drunk. Mother must never know. I see her about to go.

I return to the hotel where I am staying and get gin from the bell-boy. I drink and go to bed; I take a few the next morning and go see my mother once more. I cannot stand it. I go back to the hotel and get more gin. I drink steadily. I come to at three in the morning. The indescribable torture has me again. I turn on the light. I must get out of the room or I shall jump out of the window. I walk miles. No use. I go to the hospital, where I have made friends with the night superintendent. She puts me to bed and gives me a hypodermic. Oh, wonderful peace!

Mother and Father die the same year. What is life all about anyway? The world is crazy. Read the newspapers. Everything is a racket. Education is a racket. Medicine is a racket. Religion is a racket. How could there be a loving God who would allow so much suffering and sorrow? Bah! Don't talk to me about religion. For what were my children ever born? I wish I were dead!

234 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

I am at the hospital to see my wife. We have another child. But she is not glad to see me. I have been drinking while the baby was arriving. Her father stays with her.

My parents estates are settled at last. I have some money.

I'll try farming. It will be a good life. I'll farm on a large scale and make a good thing of it. But the deluge descends. Lack of judgment, bad management, a hurricane, and the depression create debts in ever-increasing number. But the stills are operating throughout the country-side.

It is a cold, bleak day in November. I have fought hard to stop drinking. Each battle has ended in defeat. I tell my wife I cannot stop drinking. She begs me to go to a hospital for alcoholics which has been recommended. I say I will go. She makes the arrangements, but I will not go. I'll do it all myself. This time I'm off of it for good. I'll just take a few beers now and then.

It is the last day of the following October, a dark, rainy morning. I come to in a pile of hay in a barn. I look for liquor and can't find any. I wander to a stable and drink five bottles of beer. I must get some liquor. Suddenly I feel hopeless, unable to go on. I go home. My wife is in the living room. She had looked for me last evening after I left the car and wondered off into last evening after I left the car and wandered off into the night. She had looked for me this morning. She

OUR SOUTHERN FRIEND 235

has reached the end of her rope. There is no use trying any more, for there is nothing to try. "Don't say anything," I say to her. "I am going to do something."

I am in the hospital for alcoholics. I am an alcoholic. The insane asylum lies ahead. Could I have myself locked up at home? One more foolish idea. I might go out West on a ranch where I couldn't get anything to drink. I might do that. Another foolish idea. I wish I were dead, as I have often wished before. I am too yellow to kill myself. But maybe—. The thought stays in my mind.

Four alcoholics play bridge in a smoke-filled room. Anything to get my mind from myself. The game is over and the other three leave. I start to clean up the debris. One man comes back, closing the door behind him.

He looks at me. "You think you are hopeless, don't you?" he asks.

"I know it," I reply.

"Well, you're not," says the man. "There are men on the streets of New York today who were worse than you, and they don't drink anymore."

"What are you doing here then?" I ask.

"I went out of here nine days ago saying that I was going to be honest, and I wasn't," he answers.

A fanatic, I thought to myself, but I was polite. "What is it?" I enquire.

Then he asks me if I believe in a power greater than myself, whether I call that power God, Allah, Con-

236 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

fucius, Prime Cause, Divine Mind, or any other name. I told him that I believe in electricity and other forces of nature, but as for a God, if there is one, He has never done anything for me. Then he asks me if I am willing to right all the wrongs I have ever done to anyone, no matter how wrong I thought they were. Am I willing to be honest with myself about myself and tell someone about myself, and am I willing to think of other people and of their needs instead of myself; to get rid of the drink problem?

"I'll do anything," I reply.

"Then all of your troubles are over" says the man and leaves the room. The man is in bad mental shape certainly. I pick up a book and try to read, but cannot concentrate. I get in bed and turn out the light. But I cannot sleep. Suddenly a thought comes. Can all the worthwhile people I have known be wrong about God? Then I find myself thinking about myself, and a few things that I had wanted to forget. I begin to see I am not the person I had thought myself, that I had judged myself by comparing myself to others, and always to my own advantage. It is a shock.

Then comes a thought that is like A Voice. "Who are you to say there is no God?" It rings in my head, I can't get rid of it.

I get out of bed and go to the man's room. He is reading. "I must ask you a question," I say to the man. "How does prayer fit into this thing?"

"Well," he answers, "you've probably tried praying like I have. When you've been in a jam you've said, 'God, please do this or that' and if it turned out your

OUR SOUTHERN FRIEND 237

way that was the last of it and if it didn't you've said 'There isn't any God' or 'He doesn't do anything for me'. Is that right?"

"Yes" I reply.

"That isn't the way" he continued. "The thing I do is to say 'God here I am and here are all my troubles. I've made a mess of things and can't do anything about it. You take me, and all my troubles, and do anything you want with me.' Does that answer your question?"

"Yes, it does" I answer. I return to bed. It doesn't make sense. Suddenly I feel a wave of utter hopelessness sweep over me. I am in the bottom of hell. And there a tremendous hope is born. It might be true.

I tumble out of bed onto my knees. I know not what I say. But slowly a great peace comes to me. I feel lifted up. I believe in God. I crawl back into bed and sleep like a child.

Some men and women come to visit my friend of the night before. He invites me to meet them. They are a joyous crowd. I have never seen people that joyous before. We talk. I tell them of the Peace, and that I believe in God. I think of my wife. I must write her. One girl suggests that I phone her. What a wonderful idea.

My wife hears my voice and knows I have found the answer to life. She comes to New York. I get out of the hospital and we visit some of these new-found friends. What a glorious time we have!

I am home again. I have lost the fellowship. Those that understand me are far away. The same old prob-

238 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

lems and worries surround me. Members of my family annoy me.

Nothing seems to be working out right. I am blue and unhappy. Maybe a drink—I put on my hat and dash off in the car.

Get into the lives of other people, is one thing the fellows in New York had said. I go to see a man I had been asked to visit and tell him my story. I feel much better! I have forgotten about a drink.

I am on a train, headed for a city. I have left my wife at home, sick, and I have been unkind to her in leaving. I am very unhappy. Maybe a few drinks when I get to the city will help. A great fear seizes me. I talk to the stranger in the seat with me. The fear and the insane idea is taken away.

Things are not going so well at home. I am learning that I cannot have my own way as I used to. I blame my wife and children. Anger possesses me, anger such as I have never felt before. I will not stand for it. I pack my bag and leave. I stay with understanding friends.

I see where I have been wrong in some respects. I do not feel angry any more. I return home and say I am sorry for my wrong. I am quiet again. but I have not seen yet that I should do some constructive acts of love without expecting any return. I shall learn this after some more explosions.

I am blue again. I want to sell the place and move away. I want to get where I can find some alcoholics to

OUR SOUTHERN FRIEND 239

help, and where I can have some fellowship. A man calls me on the phone. Will I take a young fellow who has been drinking for two weeks to live with me? Soon I have others who are alcoholics and some who have other problems.

I begin to play God. I feel that I can fix them all. I do not fix anyone, but I am getting part of a tremendous education and I have made some new friends.

Nothing is right. Finances are in bad shape. I must find a way to make some money. The family seems to think of nothing but spending. People annoy me. I try to read. I try to pray. Gloom surrounds me. Why has God left me? I mope around the house. I will not go out and I will not enter into anything. What is the matter? I cannot understand. I will not be that way.

I'll get drunk! It is a cold-blooded idea. It is premeditated. I fix up a little apartment over the garage with books and drinking water. I am going to town to get some liquor and food. I shall not drink until I get back to the apartment. Then I shall lock myself in and read. And as I read, I shall take little drinks at long intervals. I shall get myself "mellow" and stay that way.

I get in the car and drive off. Halfway down the driveway a thought strikes me. I'll be honest anyway. I'll tell my wife what I am going to do. I back up to the door and go into the house. I call my wife into a room where we can talk privately. I tell her quietly what I intend to do. She says nothing. She does not get excited. She maintains a perfect calm.

When I am through speaking, the whole idea has be-

240 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

come absurd. Not a trace of fear is in me. I laugh at the insanity of it. We talk of other things. Strength has come from weakness.

I cannot see the cause of this temptation now. But I am to learn later that it began with the desire for my own material success becoming greater than the interest in the welfare of my fellow man. I learn more of that foundation stone of character, which is honesty. I learn that when we act upon the highest conception of honesty which is given us, our sense of honesty becomes more acute.

I learn that honesty is truth, and the truth shall make us free!

Sensuality, drunkenness, and worldliness satisfy a man for a time, but their power is a decreasing one. God produces harmony in those who receive His Spirit and follow Its dictates.

Today as I become more harmonized within, I become more in tune with all of God's wonderful creation. The singing of the birds, the sighing of the wind, the patter of raindrops, the roll of thunder, the laughter of happy children, add to the symphony with which I am in tune. The heaving ocean, the driving rain, autumn leaves, the stars of heaven, the perfume of flowers, music, a smile, and a host of other things tell me of the glory of God.

There are periods of darkness, but the stars are shining, no matter how black the night. There are disturbances, but I have learned that if I seek patience and open-mindedness, understanding will come. And with

OUR SOUTHERN FRIEND 241

it, direction by the Spirit of God. The dawn comes and with it more understanding, the peace that passes understanding, and the joy of living that is not disturbed by the wildness of circumstances or people around me. Fears, resentments, pride, worldly desires, worry, and self-pity no longer possess me. Ever-increasing are the number of true friends, ever-growing is the capacity for love, ever-widening is the horizon of understanding. And above all else comes a greater thankfulness to, and a greater love for Our Father in heaven.

242

A BUSINESS MAN'S RECOVERY

THE S. S. "Falcon" of the Red D. Line, bound from New York to Maracaibo, Venezuela, glided up the bay, and docked at the wharf in the port of La Guayra on a hot tropical afternoon early in 1927. I was a passenger on that boat bound for the oil fields of Maracaibo as an employee of the X Oil Company, under a two year contract at a good salary and maintenance. There I hoped to buckle

down to two years of hard work, and save some money, but above all to avoid any long, continued drinking that would interfere with my work, because that had cost me too many jobs in the past. Not that I was going to give up drinking entirely; no, such a step would be too drastic. But down here in the oil fields with a bunch of hard working, hard drinking good fellows, I, too, would learn how to handle my liquor and not let it get the best of me again. Such an environment would surely do the trick, would surely teach me to drink moderately with the best of them and keep me away from those long, disastrous sprees. I was still young, I could make the grade, and this was my chance to do it. At last I had the real answer, and my troubles were over!

Red and I, who had become bosom shipboard companions on the way down from New York, stood at the rail watching the activity on the dock incident to

A BUSINESS MAN'S RECOVERY 243

getting the vessel secured alongside. Red was also on his way to Maracaibo to work for the same company, and we agreed that so long as we were going to be here overnight, we might as well go ashore together and look the town over.

Red was a swell fellow who might take a drink now and then, who might even get drunk once in a while, but he could handle his liquor and did not go to any great excesses. Thousands of other fellows like him, who have been my drinking companions from time to time, were in no way responsible for the way I drank, or what I did, or the way liquor affected me.

So off we went, Red and I, to do the town—and do it we did.

After a few drinks we decided there wasn't much else to do in town except to make a round of the "cantinas," have a good time, get back to the ship early and get a good night's rest. So what harm would a little drinking do now, I reasoned. Especially with one full day and two nights ahead to get over it.

We visited every "cantina" along the straggling main street of La Guayra, and feeling high, wide and handsome, Red and I decided to return to the ship. When we rolled down to the dock we found that our ship had been berthed off from the wharf about thirty feet and that it was necessary to take a tender out to her. No such ordinary method would satisfy Red and myself, so we decided to climb the stern hawser hand over hand to get on board. The flip of a coin decided that I would go first; so off I started, hand over hand, up the hawser.

Now even a good experienced sailor, perfectly sober, would never attempt such a foolhardy feat and, as was

244 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

to be expected, about half way up the hawser I slipped and fell into the bay with a loud splash. I remember nothing more until next morning. The captain of the boat said to me "Young man, it is true that God looks after drunken fools and little children. You probably don't know it, but this bay is infested with man-eating sharks and usually a man overboard is a goner. How close you were to death, you don't realize, but I do."

Yes, I was lucky to be saved! But it wasn't until ten years later, after I had time and time again tempted Fate by going on protracted benders that I was really saved—not until after I had been fired from job after job, tried the patience of my family to the breaking point, alienated what might have been many, many good, lasting friendships, taken my dear wife through more sorrow and heartaches than any one woman should bear in a lifetime; after doctors, hospitals, psychiatrists, rest cures, changes of scenery and all the other

paraphernalia that go with the alcoholic's futile attempts to quit drinking. Finally I dimly began to get the realization that during twenty years of continual drinking every expedient I had tried, (and I had tried them all) had failed me. I hated to admit the fact even to myself, that I just couldn't lick booze. I was licked. I was desperate. I was scared.

I was born in 1900, my father was a hardworking man who did the very best he could to support his family of four on a small income. Mother was very good to us, kind, patient, and loving. As soon as we were old enough my mother sent us to Sunday School and it so happened that as I grew older I took quite an active

A BUSINESS MAN'S RECOVERY 245

interest, becoming successively a teacher and later superintendent of a small Sunday School in uptown New York.

When the United States entered the World War in April 1917, I was under age but, like most other youngsters of that period, wanted very much to get into the fray. My parents, of course, would not hear of this but told me to be sensible and wait until I was eighteen. Being young and restless, however, and fired by the military spirit of the times, I ran away from home to join the Army in another city.

There I joined up. I didn't get into any of the actual hostilities at the front, but later, after the Armistice, served with the United States forces occupying the Rhineland, working my way up to a good non-commissioned rank.

While serving abroad I started to drink. This, of course, was entirely my own choice. Drinking by a soldier during those times was viewed with a degree of indulgence by both superiors and civilians. It seems to me, as I recall it now, that even then I wasn't satisfied to drink like the normal fellow.

Most of the United States Army of Occupation were sent back home in 1921 but my appetite for travel had been whetted, and having heard terrible stories of Prohibition in the United States, I wanted to remain in Europe where "a man could raise a thirst."

Subsequently I went to Russia, then to England, and back to Germany; working in various capacities, my drinking increasing and my drunken escapades getting worse. So back home in 1924 with the sincere desire

246 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

to stop drinking and the hope that the Prohibition I had heard so much about would enable me to do it—in other words—that it would keep me away from it.

I secured a good position, but it wasn't long before I was initiated into the mysteries of the speakeasy to such an extent that I soon found myself once more jobless. After looking around for some time, I found that my foreign experience would help me in securing work in South America. So, full of hope once more, resolved that at last I was on the wagon to stay, I sailed for the tropics. A little over a year was all the company I then worked for would stand of my continual drinking and ever-lengthening benders. So they had me poured on a boat and shipped back to New York.

This time I was really through. I promised my family and friends, who helped me get along while looking for another job, that I would never take another drink as long as I lived—and I meant it. But alas!

After several successive jobs in and around New York had been lost, and it isn't necessary to tell you the cause, I was sure that the only thing that would

enable me to get off the stuff was a change of scenery. With the help of patient, long-suffering friends, I finally persuaded an oil company that I could do a good job for them in the oil fields of Maracaibo.

But it was the same thing all over again!

Back to the United States. I really sobered up for a while-long enough to establish a connection with my present employers. During this time I met the girl who is now my wife. At last here was the real thing—I was in love. I would do anything for her. Yes, I would

A BUSINESS MAN'S RECOVERY 247

give up drinking. I would never, never do anything to even remotely affect the happiness that now came into my life. My worries were over, my problem was solved. I had sown my wild oats and now I was going to settle down to be a good husband and live a normal happy life.

And so we were married.

Supported by my new found happiness, my abstinence this time lasted about six months. Then a New Year's party we gave started me off on a long bender. The thing about this episode that is impressed on my mind is how earnestly and sincerely I then promised my wife that I would absolutely and positively this time give up drinking—and again I meant it.

No matter what we tried, and my wife helped me in each new experiment to the best of her ability and understanding, failure was always the result, and each time greater hopelessness.

The next step was doctors, a succession of them, with occasional hospitalization. I remember one doctor who thought a course of seventy-two injections, three a week, after two weeks in a private hospital, would supply the deficiency in my system that would enable me to stop drinking. The night after the seventy-second injection I was paralyzed drunk and a couple of days later talked myself out of being committed to the City Hospital.

My long-suffering employers had a long talk with me and told me that they were only willing to give me one last final chance because during my short periods of sobriety I had shown them that I could do good work.

248 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

I knew they meant it and that it was the last chance they would ever give me.

I also knew that my wife couldn't stand it much longer. Somehow or other I felt that I had been cheated—that I had not really been cured at the sanitarium even though I felt good physically. So I talked it over with my wife who said there must be something somewhere that would help me. She persuaded me to go back to the sanitarium and consult Dr.—, which thank God I did.

He told me everything had been done for me that was medically possible but that unless I decided to quit I was licked. "But doctor," I said, "I have decided time and time again to quit drinking and I was sincere each time, but each time I slipped again and each time it got worse." The doctor smiled and said, "Yes, yes, I've heard that story hundreds of times. You really never made a decision, you just made declarations. You've got to decide and if you really want to quit drinking I know of some fellows who can help you. Would you like to meet them?"

Would a condemned man like a reprieve? Of course I wanted to meet them. I was so scared and so desperate that I was willing to try anything. Thus it was that I met that band of lifesavers, Alcoholics Anonymous.

The first thing Bill told me was his own story, which paralleled mine in most respects, and then said that for three years he had had no trouble. It was plain to see that he was a supremely happy man—that he possessed a happiness and peacefulness I had for years envied in men.

A BUSINESS MAN'S RECOVERY 249

What he told me made sense because I knew that everything that I, my wife, my family and my friends had tried had failed. I had always believed in God even though I was not a devout church-goer. Many times in my life I had prayed for the things I wanted God to do for me, but it had never occurred to me that He, in His Infinite Wisdom knew much better than I what I should have, and be, and do, and that if I simply turned the decision over to Him, I would be led along the right path.

At the conclusion of our first interview, Bill suggested that I think it over and come back to see him within a few days if I was interested. Fully realizing the utter futility with which my own efforts had met in the past, and somehow or other sensing that delay might be dangerous, I was back to see him the next day.

At first it seemed a wild, crazy idea to me, but because of the fact that everything else I had tried had failed, because everything seemed so hopeless, and because it worked with these fellows who all had been through the same hell that I had been through, I was willing, at least, to have a try.

To my utter astonishment, when I did give their method a fair trial, it not only worked, but was so amazingly easy and simple that I said to them "Where have you been all my life?"

That was in February, 1937, and life took on an entirely different meaning. It was plain to see that my wife was radiantly happy. All of the differences that we seemed to have been having, all of the tenseness, the worry, confusion, the hectic days and nights that my

250 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

drinking had poured into our life together, vanished. There was peace. There was real love. There was kindness and consideration. There was everything that goes into the fabric of a happy normal existence together.

My employers, of course, the same as the writers of these stories, must remain anonymous. But I would be very thoughtless if I did not take this opportunity to acknowledge what they did for me. They kept me on, giving me chance after chance, hoping I suppose, that some day I would find the answer, although they themselves did not know what it might be. They do now, however.

A tremendous change took place in my work, in my relationship with my employers, in my association with my co-workers and in my dealings with our customers. Crazy as the idea seemed when broached to me by these men who had found it worked, God did come right into my work when permitted, as He had come into the other activities connected with my life.

With this sort of lubricant the wheels turned so much more smoothly that it seemed as if the whole machine operated on a much better basis than heretofore. Promotion that I had longed for previously, but hadn't deserved, was given to me. Soon another followed; more confidence, more trust, more responsibility and finally a key executive position in that same organization which so charitably kept me on in a minor position through the period of my drunkenness.

You can't laugh that off. Come into my home and see what a happy one it is. Look into my office, it is a

happy human beehive of activity. Look into any phase of my life and you will see joy and happiness, a sense of usefulness in the scheme of things, where formerly there was fear, sorrow and utter futility.

A DIFFERENT SLANT

I PROBABLY have one of the shortest stories in this whole volume and it is short because there is one point I wish to get over to an occasional man who may be in my position.

Partner in one of this country's nationally known concerns, happily married with fine children, sufficient income to indulge my whims and future security from the financial standpoint should paint a picture in which there would be no possibility of a man becoming an alcoholic from the psychological standpoint. I had nothing to escape from and I am known as a conservative, sound business man.

I had missed going to my office several times while I tapered off and brought myself to sobriety. This time, though, I found I could not taper off, I could not stop and I had to be hospitalized. That was the greatest shock to my pride I ever had. Such a blow that I made the firm resolve to never again taste as much as one glass of beer. Careful thought and analysis went into that decision.

The doctor at this hospital told me vaguely of the work of men who called themselves Alcoholics Anonymous and asked if I wanted one of them to call upon me. I was sure I needed no outside help, but in order to be polite to the doctor and hoping he would forget it, I assented.

A DIFFERENT SLANT 253

I was embarrassed when a chap called at my house one evening and told me about himself. He quickly sensed my slight resentment and made it plain to me that none of the crowd were missionaries, nor did they feel it their duty to try to help anyone who did not want help. I think I closed the talk by saying I was glad I was not an alcoholic and sorry he had been bothered by me.

Within sixty days, after leaving the hospital the second time, I was pounding at his door, willing to do anything to conquer the vicious thing that had conquered me.

The point I hope I have made is—even a man with everything from the material standpoint, a man with tremendous pride and the will power to function in all ordinary circumstances can become an alcoholic and find himself as hopeless and helpless as the man who has a multitude of worries and troubles.

TRAVELER, EDITOR, SCHOLAR

THE annual post-game banquet was winding up. The last rolling "R" of the speaker's hearty Caledonian accent died away sonorously. The company of students and alumni, all Scots, began to adjourn to the spacious bar for stronger stuff than the comparatively innocuous wines on the tables. A goal-scorer in a soccer game between my school and its centuries-old rival, I rated some popu-

larity and the admiration of the moment expressed in famous ales and whiskey and soda. I was the son of a clergyman and just past sixteen years of age.

Waking in my hotel room the next day, I groaned. I didn't want to see or talk to anyone. Then someone raised my head and put a glass to my lips. "What you need is 'a hair of the dog that bit you', get this into you."

The smell of the stuff sickened me. I grimaced, gulped the draught down and fell back on the bed. Somehow it stayed down and in about fifteen minutes I began to feel better and managed to eat a fair breakfast. That was my first experience of the "morning after" drink.

Back to college and my apprenticeship to a well known lawyer, the students in their various clubs and societies, tiptoed enormously. I gave up the law but stayed in school to graduate. Through these college years in a city of well over a million inhabitants I learned

TRAVELER, EDITOR, SCHOLAR 255

all the better barrooms. Burns and Byron and other colorful profligates were the literary idols in the gang of "bloods" with whom I was a popular figure. I thought I was a gay dog and this was the life.

With nothing but a liberal arts education, very definitely estranged from my family and already married, soon after graduation I became a bookmaker's clerk on the British racing circuits, far better off financially than the average professional man. I moved in a gay crowd in the various "pubs" and sporting clubs. My wife traveled with me, but with a baby coming I decided to settle in a large city where I got a job with a commission agent which is a polite term for a handbook operator. My job was to collect bets and betting-slips in the business section, a lucrative spot. My boss, in his way, was "big business." Drinking was all in the day's work.

One evening, the book, after checking up, was very definitely in the red for plenty through a piece of studied carelessness on my part, and my boss, very shrewd and able, fired me with a parting statement to the effect that once was enough. With a good stake I sailed for New York. I knew I was through among the English "bookies."

Tom Sharkey's brawling bar on 14th Street and the famous wine room at the back were headquarters for me. I soon ran through my stake. Some college friends got me jobs when I finally had to go to work, but I didn't stick to them. I wanted to travel. Making my way to Pittsburgh, I met other former friends and got a job in a large factory where piecemakers were making good money. My fellow-workers were mostly good

256 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Saturday night drinkers and I was right with them. Young and able to travel with the best of them, I managed to hold my job and keep my end up in the barrooms.

One of my keenest memories is of meeting Jack London who came in unannounced one night to our favorite saloon, made a rousing speech, and later set up the drinks all evening.

I quit the factory and got a job on a small newspaper, going from that to a Pittsburgh daily, long ago defunct. Following a big drunk on that sheet where I was doing leg-work and rewrite, a feeling of nostalgia made me buy a ticket for Liverpool and I returned to Britain.

During my visit there, renewing acquaintance with former friends I soon spent most of my money. I wanted to roam again and through relatives got a super cargo job on an Australian packet which allowed me to visit my people in Australia where I was born. But I didn't stay long. I was soon back in Liverpool. Coming out of a pub near the Cunard pier I saw the Lusitania standing out in the middle of the Mersey. She had just come in and was scheduled to sail in two days. In my mind's eye I saw Broadway again and Tom Sharkey's bar; the roar of the subway was in my ears. Saying goodbye to my wife and baby, I was treading Manhattan's streets in a little more than a week. Again I spent my bankroll, by no means as thick as the one I had when I first saw the skyline of Gotham. I was soon broke, this time without trainfare to go anywhere. I got my first introduction to "riding the rods and making a blind."

TRAVELER, EDITOR, SCHOLAR 257

In my early twenties the hardships of hobo life did not discourage me but I had no wish to become just a tramp. Forced to detrain from an empty gondola on the other side of Chicago by a terrific rainstorm which drenched me to the skin, I hit the first factory building I saw for a job. That job began a series of brief working spells, each one ending in a "drunk" and the urge to travel. My migrations extended for over a year as far west as Omaha. Drifting back to Ohio, I landed on a small newspaper and later was impressed into the direction of boy welfare work at the local "Y". I stayed sober for four years except for a one-night carousel in Chicago. I stayed so sober that I used to keep a quart of medicinal whiskey in my bureau which I used to taper off the occasional newspaper alcoholics who were sent to see me.

Lots of times, vain-gloriously, I used to take the bottle out, look at it and say, "I've got you licked."

The war was getting along. Curious about it, feeling I was missing something, absolutely without any illusions about the aftermath, with no pronounced feeling of patriotism, I joined up with a Canadian regiment, serving a little over two years. Slight casualties, complicated however by a long and serious illness, were my only mishaps. Remarkably enough, I was a very abstemious soldier. My four years of abstinence had something to do with it, but soldiering is a tough enough game for a sober man, and I had no yen for full-pack slogging through mud with a cognac or vin rouge hangover.

Discharged in 1919, I really made up for my dry spell.

258 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Quebec, Toronto, Buffalo, and finally Pittsburgh, were the scenes of man-sized drunks until I had gone through my readjusted discharge pay, a fair sum.

I again became a reporter on a Pittsburgh daily. I applied for a publicity job and got it. My wife came over from Scotland and we started housekeeping in a large Ohio city.

The new job lasted five years. Every encouragement was given me with frequent salary increases, but the sober times between "periods" became shorter. I myself could see deterioration in my work, from being physically and mentally affected by liquor, although I had not yet reached the point where all I wanted was more to drink. Successive Monday morning hangovers, which despite mid-week resolutions to do better, came with unflinching regularity, eventually causing me to quit my job. Washington, D. C. and news-gathering agency

work followed with many parties. I couldn't stand the pace. My drinking was never the spaced doses of the careful tippler; it was always gluttonous.

Returning to the town I had left three months before I became editor of a monthly magazine, soon had additional publicity and advertising accounts and the money rolled in. The strain of overwork soon led me to the bottle again. My wife made several attempts to get me to stop and I had the usual visits from persons who would always ask me "Why?"—as if I knew! Offered the job of advertising manager for an eastern automotive company, I moved to Philadelphia to begin life anew. In three months John Barleycorn had me kicked out.

TRAVELER, EDITOR, SCHOLAR 259

I did six years of newspaper advertising, and trade journal work with many, many drunks of drab and dreary hue woven into the pattern of my life. I visited my family just once in that time. An old avocation, the collection of first editions, rare books and Americana, fascinated me between times. I had some financial success through no ability of my own, and, when jobless and almost wiped out in 1930, I began to trade and sell my collection and much of the proceeds went to keep my apartment stocked with liquor and almost every night saw me helpless to bed.

I tried to help myself. I even began to go the rounds of the churches. I listened to famous ministers—found nothing. I began to know the inside of jails and workhouses. My family would have nothing to do with me, in fact couldn't, because I couldn't spare any of my money which I needed for drink to support them. My last venture, a book shop, was hastened to closed doors by my steady intoxication. Then I had an idea.

Loading a car with good old books to sell to collectors, librarians, universities and historical societies, I started out to travel the country. I stayed sober during the trip except for an occasional bottle of beer because funds barely met expenses. When I hit Houston, Texas, I found employment in a large bookstore. Need I say here that in a very short time I was walking along a prairie highway with arm extended and thumb pointed? In the two succeeding years I held ten different jobs ranging from newspaper copy-desk and rewrite, to traffic director for an oil field equipment company. Always in between there were intervals of being broke,

260 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

riding freights and hitchhiking interminable distances from one big town to another in three states. Now on a new job I was always thinking about payday and how much liquor I could buy and the pleasure I could have.

I knew I was a drunkard. Enduring all the hangover hells that every alcoholic experiences, I made the usual resolutions. My thoughts sometimes turned to the idea that there must be a remedy. I have stood listening to street corner preachers tell how they did beat the game. They seemed to be happy in their fashion, they and the little group of supporters, but always pride of intellect stopped me from seeking what they evidently had. Sniffing at emotional religion I walked away. I was an honest agnostic but definitely not a hater of the church or its adherents. What philosophy I had was thoroughly paganistic—all my life was devoted to a search for pleasure. I wanted to do nothing except what it pleased me to do and when I wanted to do it.

Federal Theatre in Texas gave me an administrative job which I held for a year, only because I worked hard and productively when I worked, and be-

cause my very tolerant chief ascribed my frequent lapses to a bohemian temperament. When it was closed through Washington edict I began with Federal Writers in San Antonio. In those days my system was always to drink up my last pay check and believe that necessity would bring the next job. A friend who knew I would soon be broke mounted guard over me when I left my job of writing the histories of Texas cities and put me aboard a bus for the town I had left almost five years before.

TRAVELER, EDITOR, SCHOLAR 261

In five years a good many persons had forgotten that I had been somewhat notorious. I had arrived drunk but promised my wife I would keep sober, and I knew I could get work if I did. Of course, I didn't keep sober. My wife and family stood by me for ten weeks and then, quite justifiably, ejected me. I managed to maintain myself with odd jobs, did ten weeks in a social rescue institution and at length wound up in a second-hand bookstore in an adjacent town as manager. While there I was called to the hospital in my home town to see a former partner who had insisted that I visit him. I found my friend was there for alcoholism and now he was insisting that he had found the only cure. I listened to him, rather tolerantly. I noticed a Bible on his table and it amazed me. I had never known him to be anything but a good healthy pagan with a propensity for getting into liquor jams and scrapes. As he talked I gathered vaguely, (because he was a faltering beginner then just as I am now) that to be relieved of alcoholism I would have to be different.

Some days later, after he had been discharged, a stranger came into my shop in the nearby town. He introduced himself and began to tell me about a bunch of some 60 former drinkers and drunkards who met once a week, and he invited me to go with him to the next meeting. I thanked him, pleaded business engagements and promised I'd go with him at some future date.

"Anyhow, I'm on the wagon now," I said. "I'm doing a job I like and it's quiet where I live, practically no temptations. I don't feel bothered about liquor."

He looked at me quizzically. He knew too well that

262 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

didn't mean a thing just as I knew in my heart that it would be only a question of time—a few days, a week, or even a month, it was inevitable—till I would be off on another bender. The time came just a week later. And as I look back on the events of two months, I can clearly see that I had been circling around, half-afraid of encountering the remedy for my situation, half-wanting it, deferring fulfillment of my promise to get in touch with the doctor I had heard about. An accident while drunk laid me low for about three weeks. As soon as I could get up and walk I started to drink again and kept it up until my friend of the hospital, who, in his first try at the new way of life had stubbed his toe in Chicago but had come back to the town to take counsel and make a new start, picked me up and got me into a hospital.

I had been drinking heavily from one state of semi-coma to another and it was several days before I got "defogged" but subconsciously I was in earnest about wanting to quit liquor forever. It was no momentary emotionalism born of self-pity in a maudlin condition. I was seeking something and I was ready to learn. I did not need to be told that my efforts were and would be unavailing if

I did not get help. The doctor who came to see me almost at once did not assail me with any new doctrines; he made sure that I had a need and that I wanted to have that need filled and little by little I learned how my need could be met. The story of Alcoholics Anonymous fascinated me. Singly and in groups of two or three, they came to visit me. Some of them I had known for years, good two-fisted drinkers

TRAVELER, EDITOR, SCHOLAR 263

who had disappeared from their former haunts. I had missed them myself from the barrooms of the town.

There were business men, professional men, and factory workers. All sorts were represented and their relation of experiences and how they had found the only remedy, added to their human existence as sober men, laid the foundation of a very necessary faith. Indeed, I was beginning to see that I would require implicit faith, like a small child, if I was going to get anywhere or so it appeared as I lay in that hospital. The big thing was that these men were all sober and evidently had something I didn't have. Whatever it was, I wanted it.

I left the hospital on a meeting night. I was greeted warmly, honestly, and with a true ring of sincerity by everyone present. That night I was taken home by a former alcoholic and his wife. They did not show me to my room and wish me a good night's rest. Instead, over coffee cups, this man and his wife told me what had been done for them. They were earnest and obviously trying to help me on the road I had chosen. They will never know how much their talk with me has helped. The hospitality of their home and their fine fellowship were mine freely.

I had never, since the believing days of childhood, been able to conceive an authority directing the universe. But I had never been a flippant, wise-cracking sneerer at the few persons I had met who had impressed me as Christian men and women, or at any institutions whose sincerity of purpose I could see. No conviction was necessary to establish my status as a miserable failure at managing my own life. I began to read the Bible

264 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

daily and to go over a simple devotional exercise as a way to begin each day. Gradually I began to understand.

I cannot say that my taste for liquor has entirely disappeared. It has been that way with some, but it has not been with me and may never be. Neither can I honestly say that I have forgotten the "fleshpots of Egypt." I haven't. But I can remember the urge of the Prodigal Son to return to his Father that he might taste of the husks that the swine did eat.

Formerly in the acute mental and physical pain during the remorseful periods succeeding each drunk, I found my recollection of the misery I had gone through a bolsterer of resolution and afterward, perhaps, a deterrent for a time. But in those days I had no one to whom I might take my troubles. Today I have. Today I have Someone who will always hear me; I have a warm fellowship among men who understand my problems; I have tasks to do and am glad to do them, to see others who are alcoholics and to help them in any way I can to become sober men.

THE BACK-SLIDER

WHEN I was graduated from high school the World War was on in full blast. I was too young for the army but old enough to man a machine for the production of the means of wholesale destruction. I became a machine hand at high wages. Machinery appealed to me anyway, because I had always wanted to be a mechanical engineer. Keen to learn as many different operations as possible, I insisted on being transferred from one operation to another until I had a good practical knowledge of all machines in a standard machine shop. With that equipment I was ready to travel for broader experience and in seven years had worked in the leading industrial centers in the eastern states, supplementing my shop work with night classes in marine engineering.

I had the good times of the period but confined my drinking to weekends, with an occasional party after work in the evenings. But I was unsettled and dissatisfied, and in a sense disgusted with going from job to job and achieving nothing more than a weekly pay envelope. I wasn't particularly interested in making a lot of money, but I wanted to be comfortable and independent as soon as possible.

So I married at that time, and for a while it seemed that I had found the solution to my urge for moving around. Most people settle down when they marry

266 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

and I thought I'd have the same experience, that my wife and I would chose a place where we could establish a home and bring up a family. I had the dream of wearing carpet slippers in a life of comparative ease by the time I was forty. It didn't work out that way. After the newness of being married had worn off a little the old wander business got me again.

In 1924 I brought my wife to a growing city in the middle west where work was always plentiful. I had been in and out of it several times before and I could always get a job in the engineering department of its largest industrial plant. I early acquired the spirit of the organization which had a real reputation for constructive education of its workers. It encouraged ambition and aided latent talent to develop. I was keen about my work and strove always to place myself in line for promotion. I had a thorough knowledge of the mechanical needs of the plant and when I was offered a job in the purchasing department's mechanical section I took it.

We were now resident in sort of a workers' paradise, a beautifully landscaped district where employees were encouraged to buy homes from the company. We had a boy about two years after I started with the company and with his advent I began to take marriage seriously. My boy was going to have the best I could give him. He would never have to work through the years as I had done. We had a very nice circle of acquaintance where we lived, nice neighbors and my colleagues in the engineering department and later in purchasing were good people, many of them bent on getting ahead and enjoy-

THE BACK-SLIDER 267

ing the good things of life while they climbed. We had nice parties with very little drinking, just enough to give a little Saturday night glow to things—never enough to get beyond control.

Fateful and fatal came the month of October in the year 1929. Work slowed down. Reassuring statements from financial leaders maintained our confidence that industry would soon be on an even keel again. But the boat kept rocking. In our organization, as in many others, the purchasing department found its work lessened by executive order. Personnel was cut down. Those who were left went around working furiously at whatever there was to do, looking furtively at each other wondering who would be next to go. I wondered if the long hours of overtime with no pay would be recognized in the cutting down program. I lay awake lots of nights just like any other man who sees what he has built up threatened with destruction.

I was laid off. I took it hard for I had been doing a good job and I thought as a man often will, that it might have been somebody else who should get the axe. Yet there was a sense of relief. It had happened. And partly through resentment and partly from a sense of freedom I went out and got pretty well intoxicated. I stayed drunk for three days, something very unusual for me, who had very seldom lost a day's work from drinking.

My experience soon helped me to a fairly important job in the engineering department of another company. My work took me out of town quite a bit, never at any great distance from home, but frequently overnight.

268 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Sometimes I wouldn't have to report at the office for a week, but I was always in touch by phone. In a way I was practically my own boss and being away from office discipline I was an easy victim to temptation. And temptation certainly existed. I had a wide acquaintance among the vendors to our company who liked me and were very friendly. At first I turned down the countless offers I had to take a drink, but it wasn't long before I was taking plenty.

I'd get back into town after a trip, pretty well organized from my day's imbibing. It was only a step from this daily drinking to successive bouts with absence from my route. I would phone and my chief couldn't tell from my voice whether I had been drinking or not, but gradually learned of my escapades and warned me of the consequences to myself and my job. Finally when my lapses impaired my efficiency and some pressure was brought to bear on the chief, he let me go. That was in 1932.

I found myself back exactly where I had started when I came to town. I was still a good mechanic and could always get a job as an hourly rated machine operator. This seemed to be the only thing which offered and once more I discarded the white collar for the overalls and canvas gloves. I had spent more than half a dozen good years and had got exactly nowhere, so I did my first really serious drinking. I was good for at least ten days or two weeks off every two months I worked, getting drunk and then half-heartedly sobering up. This went on for almost three years. My wife did the best she could to help me at first, but eventually lost patience

THE BACK-SLIDER 269

and gave up trying to do anything with me at all. I was thrown into one hospital after another, got sobered up, discharged, and ready for another bout. What money I had saved dwindled and I turned everything I had into cash to keep on drinking.

In one hospital, a Catholic Institution, one of the sisters had talked religion to me and had brought a priest in to see me. Both were sorry for me and as-

sured me that I would find relief in Mother Church. I wanted none of it. "If I couldn't stop drinking of my own free will, I was certainly not going to drag God into it," I thought.

During another hospital stay a minister whom I liked and respected came to see me. To me, he was just another nonalcoholic who was unable, even by the added benefit and authority of the cloth, to do anything for an alcoholic.

I sat down one day to figure things out. I was no good to myself, my wife, or my growing boy. My drinking had even affected him; he was a nervous, irritable child, getting along badly at school, making poor grades because the father he knew was a sot and an unpredictable one. My insurance was sufficient to take care of my wife and child for a fresh start by themselves and I decided that I'd simply move out of the world for good. I took a killing dose of bichloride of mercury.

They rushed me to the hospital. The emergency physicians applied the immediate remedies but shook their heads. There wasn't a chance, they said. And for days it was touch and go. One day the chief resident

270 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

physician came in on his daily rounds. He had often seen me there before for alcoholism.

Standing at my bedside he showed more than professional interest, tried to buoy me up with the desire to live. He asked me if I would really like to quit drinking and have another try at living. One clings to life no matter how miserable. I told him I would and that I would try again. He said he was going to send another doctor to see me, to help me.

This doctor came and sat beside my bed. He tried to cheer me up about my future, pointed out I was still a young man with the world to lick and insisted that I could do it if I really wanted to stop drinking. Without telling me what it was, he said he had an answer to my problem and condition that really worked. Then he told me very simply the story of his own life, a life of generous tipping after professional hours for more than three decades until he had lost almost everything a man can lose, and how he had found and applied the remedy with complete success. He felt sure I could do the same. Day after day he called on me in the hospital and spent hours talking to me.

He simply asked me to make a practical application of beliefs I already held theoretically but had forgotten all my life. I believed in a God who ruled the universe. The doctor submitted to me the idea of God as a father who would not willingly let any of his children perish and suggested that most, if not all of our troubles, come from being completely out of touch with the idea of God, with God Himself. All my life, he said, I had been doing things of my own human will as opposed to

THE BACK-SLIDER 271

God's will and that the only certain way for me to stop drinking was to submit my will to God and let Him handle my difficulties.

I had never looked on my situation in that way, had always felt myself very remote indeed from a Supreme Being. "Doc," as I shall call him hereinafter, was pretty positive that God's law was the Law of Love and that all my resentful feelings which I had fed and cultivated with liquor were the result of either conscious or unconscious, it didn't matter which, disobedience to that law. Was I willing to submit my will? I said I would try to do so. While I was still at

the hospital his visits were supplemented by visits from a young fellow who had been a heavy drinker for years but had run into "Doc" and had tried his remedy.

At that time, the ex-alcoholics in this town, who have now grown to considerable proportions, numbered only Doc and two other fellows. To help themselves and compare notes they met once a week in a private house and talked things over. As soon as I came from the hospital I went with them. The meeting was without formality. Taking love as the basic command I discovered that my faithful attempt to practice a law of love led me to clear myself of certain dishonesties.

I went back to my job. New men came and we were glad to visit them. I found that new friends helped me to keep straight and the sight of every new alcoholic in the hospital was a real object lesson to me. I could see in them myself as I had been, something I had never been able to picture before.

Now I come to the hard part of my story. It would

272 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

be great to say I progressed to a point of splendid fulfillment, but it wouldn't be true. My later experience points a moral derived from a hard and bitter lesson. I went along peacefully for two years after God had helped me quit drinking. And then something happened. I was enjoying the friendship of my ex-alcoholic fellows and getting along quite well in my work and in my small social circle. I had largely won back the respect of my former friends and the confidence of my employer. I was feeling fine—too fine. Gradually I began to take the plan I was trying to follow apart. After all, I asked myself, did I really have to follow any plan at all to stay sober? Here I was, dry for two years and getting along all right. It wouldn't hurt if I just carried on and missed a meeting or two. If not present in the flesh I'd be there in spirit, I said in excuse, for I felt a little bit guilty about staying away.

And I began to neglect my daily communication with God. Nothing happened—not immediately at any rate. Then came the thought that I could stand on my own feet now. When that thought came to mind—that God might have been all very well for the early days or months of my sobriety but I didn't need Him now—I was a gone coon. I got clear away from the life I had been attempting to lead. I was in real danger. It was just a step from that kind of thinking to the idea that my two years training in total abstinence was just what I needed to be able to handle a glass of beer. I began to taste. I became fatalistic about things and soon was drinking deliberately knowing I'd get drunk, stay drunk, and what would inevitably happen.

THE BACK-SLIDER 273

My friends came to my aid. They tried to help me, but I didn't want help. I was ashamed and preferred not to see them come around. And they knew that as long as I didn't want to quit, as long as I preferred my own will instead of God's will, the remedy simply could not be applied. It is a striking thought that God never forces anyone to do His will, that His help is ever available but has to be sought in all earnestness and humility.

This condition lasted for months, during which time I had voluntarily entered a private institution to get straightened out. On the last occasion when I came out of the fog, I asked God to help me again. Shamefaced as I was, I went back to the fellowship. They made me welcome, offered me collectively and

individually all the help I might need. They treated me as though nothing had happened. And I feel that it is the most telling tribute to the efficacy of this remedy that during my period of relapse I still knew this remedy would work with me if I would let it, but I was too stubborn to admit it.

That was a year ago. Depend upon it I stay mighty close to what has proven to be good for me. I don't dare risk getting very far away. And I have found that in simple faith I get results by placing my life in God's hands every day, by asking Him to keep me a sober man for 24 hours, and trying to do His will. He has never let me down yet.

HOME BREWMEISTER

STRANGELY enough, or by some queer quirk, I became acquainted with the "hilarious life just at the time in my life when I was beginning to really settle down to a common sense, sane, domestic life. My wife became pregnant and the doctor recommended the use of Porter Ale . . . so . . . I bought a six gallon crock and a few bottles, listened to advice from amateur brewmeisters, and was off on my beer manufacturing career on a small scale (for the time being). Somehow or other, I must have misunderstood the doctor's instructions, for I not only made the beer for my wife, I also drank it for her.

As time went on, I found that it was customary to open a few bottles whenever visitors dropped in. That being the case, it didn't take me long to figure out that my meager manufacturing facilities were entirely inadequate to the manufacture of beer for social and domestic consumption. From that point on, I secured crocks of ten gallon capacity and really took quite an active interest in the manufacture of home brew.

We were having card parties with limburger and beer quite regularly. Eventually, of course, what with all the hilarity that could be provoked with a few gallons of beer, there seemed to be no need of bridge or poker playing for entertainment. Well . . . we all know how those things go. The parties waxed more liquid

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS 275

and hilarious as time went on, and eventually I discovered that a little shot of liquor now and then between beers had the tendency to put me in a whacky mood much quicker than having to down several quarts of beer to obtain the same results. The inevitable result of this discovery was that I soon learned that beer made a very good wash for whiskey. That discovery so intrigued me, that I stayed on that diet almost entirely for the balance of my extended drinking career. Yes sir, the old Boilermaker and his Helper. The last day of my drinking career, I drank 22 of them between 10 and 12 A.M. and I shall never know how many more followed them until I was poured into bed that night.

I was getting along fairly well with my party drinking for quite some time however, but eventually I began to visit beer joints in between parties. A night or so a week in a joint, and a party or so a week at home or with friends, along with a little lone drinking, soon had me preparing for the existence of a top flight drunkard.

Three years after I started on my drinking career, I lost my first job. At that time, I was living out of town, so I moved back to the home town and made a connection in a responsible position with one of the larger companies in the

finance business. Up to this point I had spent six years in the business and had enjoyed the reputation of being very successful.

My new duties were extremely confining and my liquor consumption began to increase at this time. Upon leaving the office in the evening, my first stop would be a saloon about a block from the office. However, as there happened to be several saloons within that distance,

276 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

I didn't find it necessary to patronize the same place each evening. It doesn't pay to be seen in the same place at the same hour every day, you know.

The general procedure was to take 4 or 5 shots in the first place I stopped at. This would get me feeling fit, and then I would start for home and fireside, thirteen miles away. Well . . . on the way home numerous places must be passed. If I were alone I would stop at four or five of them, but only one or two in the event I had my mistrusting wife with me.

Eventually I would arrive home for a late supper, for which, of course, I had absolutely no relish. I would make a feeble attempt at eating supper but never met with any howling success. I never enjoyed any meal, but I ate my lunch at noon for two reasons: first, to help get me out of the fog of the night before, and second, to furnish some measure of nourishment. (My enjoyment of meals now is an added feature to the Seven Wonders of the World to me. I can still hardly believe it). Eventually, the noon meal was also dispensed with.

I cannot remember just when I became the victim of insomnia, but I do know that the last year and a half I never went to bed sober a single night. I couldn't sleep. I had a mortal fear of going to bed and tossing all night. Evenings at home were an ordeal. As a result, I would fall off in a drunken stupor every night.

How I was able to discharge my duties at the office during those horrible mornings, I will never be able to explain. Handling customers, dealers, insurance people, dictation, telephoning, directing new employees, answering to superiors, etc. However, it finally caught

HOME BREWMEISTER 277

up with me, and when it did, I was a mental, physical, and nervous wreck.

I arrived at the stage where I couldn't quite make it to the office some mornings. Then I would send an excuse of illness. But the firm became violently ill with my drunkenness and their course of treatment was to remove their ulcer in the form of me from their payroll, amid much fanfare and very personal and slighting remarks and insinuations.

During this time, I had been threatened, beaten, kissed, praised and damned alternately by relatives, family, friends and strangers, but of course it all went for naught. How many times I swore off in the morning and got drunk before sunset I don't know. I was on the toboggan and really making time.

After being fired, I lined up with a new finance company that was just starting in business, and took the position of business promotion man, contacting automobile dealers. WOW . . . was that something??? While working in an office, there was some semblance of restraint, but, oh boy, when I got on the outside with this new company without supervision, did I go to town???

I really worked for several weeks, and having had a fairly wide acquaintance with the dealer trade, it was not difficult for me to line enough of them up to give me a very substantial volume of business with a minimum of effort.

Now I was getting drunk all the time. It wasn't necessary to report to the office in person every day, and when I did go in, it was just to make an appearance

278 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

and bounce right out again. Was that a merry-go-round for the eight months that it lasted???

Finally this company also became ill and I was once more looking for a job. Then I learned something else. I learned that a person just can't find a job hanging in a dive or barroom all day and all night, as jobs don't seem to turn up in those places. I became convinced of that because I spent most of my time there and nary a job turned up. By this time, my chances of getting lined up in my chosen business were shot. Everyone had my number and wouldn't hire me at any price.

I have omitted details of transgressions that I made when drunk for several reasons. One is that I don't remember too many of them, as I was one of those drunks who could be on his feet and attend a meeting or a party, engage in a conversation with people and do things that any nearly normal person would do, and the next day, not remember a thing about where I was, what I did, who I saw, or how I got home. (That condition was a distinct handicap to me in trying to vindicate myself with the not so patient wife).

I also committed other indiscretions of which I see no particular point in relating. Anyone who is a rummy or is close to rummies knows what all those things amount to without having to be told about them.

Things eventually came to the point where I had no friends. I didn't care to go visiting unless the parties we might visit had plenty of liquor on hand and I could get stinking drunk. Fact is, that I was always well on my way before I would undertake to go visiting at all.

HOME BREWMEISTER 279

(Naturally, this condition was also a source of great delight to my wife).

After holding good positions, making better than average income for over ten years, I was in debt, had no clothes to speak of, no money, no friends, and no one any longer tolerating me but my wife. My son had absolutely no use for me. Even some of the saloon keepers where I had spent so much time and money, requested that I stay away from their places. Finally, an old business acquaintance of mine, whom I hadn't seen for several years offered me a job. I was on that job a month and drunk most of the time.

Just at this time my wife heard of a doctor in another city who had been very successful with drunks. She offered me the alternative of going to see him or her leaving me for good and all. Well . . . I had a job, and I really wanted desperately to stop drinking, but couldn't, so I readily agreed to visit the doctor she recommended.

That was the turning point of my life. My wife accompanied me on my visit and the doctor really told me some things that in my state of jitters nearly knocked me out of the chair. He talked about himself, but I was sure it was me. He mentioned lies, deceptions, etc. in the course of his story in the presence of the one person in the world I wouldn't want to know such things. How did he know all this? I had never seen him before, and at the time he hoped to hell I would never see him again. However, he explained to me that he had been just such a rummy as I, only for a much longer period of time.

He advised me to enter the particular hospital to which staff he was connected and I readily agreed. In all honesty though, I was skeptical, but I wanted so definitely to quit drinking that I would have welcomed any sort of physical torture or pain to accomplish the result.

I made arrangements to enter the hospital three days later and promptly went out and got stiff for three days. It was with grim foreboding and advanced jitters that I checked in at the hospital. Of course, I had no hint or intimation as to what the treatment was to consist of. Was I to be surprised!

After being in the hospital for several days, a plan of living was outlined to me. A very simple plan that I find much joy and happiness in following. It is impossible to put on paper all the benefits I have derived . . . physical, mental, domestic, spiritual, and monetary.

This is no idle talk. It is the truth.

From a physical standpoint, I gained 16 pounds in the first two months I was off liquor. I eat three good meals a day now, and really enjoy them. I sleep like a baby, and never give a thought to such a thing as insomnia. I feel as I did when I was fifteen years younger.

Mentally . . . I know where I was last night, the night before, and the nights before that. Also, I have no fear of anything. I have self confidence and assurance that cannot be confused with the cockeiness or noise-making I once possessed. I can think clearly and am helped much in my thinking and judgment by my spiritual development which grows daily.

From a domestic standpoint, we really have a home

HOME BREWMEISTER 281

now. I am anxious to get home after dark. My wife is ever glad to see me come in. My youngster has adopted me. Our home is always full of friends and visitors (No home brew as an inducement).

Spiritually . . . I have found a Friend who never lets me down and is ever eager to help. I can actually take my problems to Him and He does give me comfort, peace, and radiant happiness.

From a monetary standpoint . . . in the past nine months, I have reduced my reckless debts to almost nothing, and have had money to get along comfortably. I still have my job, and just prior to the writing of this narrative, I received an advancement.

For all of these blessings, I thank Him.

THE SEVEN MONTH SLIP

AT FOURTEEN years of age, when I should have been at home under the supervision of my parents, I was in the United States army serving a one year enlistment. I found myself with a bunch of men none too good for a fourteen year old kid who passed easily for eighteen. I transferred my heroworshipping to these men of the world. I suppose the worst damage done in that year in the army barracks was the development of an almost unconscious admiration for their apparently jolly sort of living.

Once out of uniform I went to Mexico where I worked for an oil company. Here I learned to take on a good cargo of beer and hold it. Later I rode the

range in the Texas cow country and often went to town with the boys to "whoop it up on payday." By the time I returned to my home in the middle west I had learned several patterns of living, to say nothing of a cock-sure attitude that I needed no advice from anyone.

The next ten years are sketchy. During this time I married and established my own home and everything was lovely for a time. Soon I was having a good time getting around the law in speakeasies. Oh yes, I outsmarted our national laws but I was not quite successful in evading the old moral law.

I was working for a large industrial concern and had been promoted to a supervisory job. In spite of big

THE SEVEN MONTH SLIP 283

parties, I was for three or four years able to be on the job the next morning. Then gradually the hangovers became more persistent and I found myself not only needing a few shots of liquor before I could go to work at all, but finally found it advisable to stay at home and sober up by the taper-off method. My bosses tried to give me some good advice. When that didn't help they tried more drastic measures, laying me off without pay. They covered up my too frequent absences many times in order to keep them from the attention of the higher officials in the company.

My attitude was that I could handle my liquor whenever I wanted to go about it seriously, and I considered my absences no worse than those of other employees and officials who were getting away with murder in their drinking.

One does not have to use his imagination much to realize that this sort of drinking is hard on the matrimonial relationship. After proving myself neither faithful nor capable of being temperate, my wife left me and obtained a judicial separation. This gave me a really good excuse to get drunk.

In the years 1933 and 1934 I was fired several times, but always got my job back on my promises to do better. On the last occasion I was reduced to the labor gang in the plant. I made a terrific effort to stay sober and prove myself capable of better things. I succeeded pretty well and one day I was called into the production chief's office and told I had met with the approval of the executive department and to be ready to start on a better job.

284 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

This good news seemed to justify a mild celebration with a few beers. Exactly four days later I reported for work only to find that they too knew about the "mild" celebration and that they had decided to check me out altogether. After a time I went back and was assigned to one of the hardest jobs in the factory. I was in bad shape physically and after six months of this, I quit, going on a drunk with my last pay check.

Then I began to find that the friends with whom I had been drinking for some time seemed to disappear. This made me resentful and I found myself many times feeling that everybody was against me. Bootleg joints became my hangouts. I sold my books, car, and even clothing in order to buy a few drinks.

I am certain that my family kept me from gravitating to flophouses and gutters. I am eternally thankful to them that they never threw me out or refused me help when I was drinking. Of course I didn't appreciate their kindness then, and I began to stay away from home on protracted drinking spells.

Somehow my family heard of two men in town who had found a way to quit drinking. They suggested that I contact these men but I retorted "If I can't

handle my liquor with my own will power then I had better jump over the viaduct.“

Another of my usual drinking spells came on. I drank for about ten days with no food except coffee before I was sick enough to start the battle back to sobriety with the accompanying shakes, night sweats, jittery nerves, and horrible dreams. This time I felt that I really needed some help. I told my mother she

THE SEVEN MONTH SLIP 285

could call the doctor who was the center of the little group of former drinkers. She did.

I allowed myself to be taken to a hospital where it took several days for my head to clear and my nerves to settle. Then, one day I had a couple of visitors, one a man from New York and the other a local attorney. During our conversation I learned that they had been as bad as myself in this drinking, and that they had found relief and had been able to make a come-back. Later they went into more detail and put it to me very straight that I'd have to give over my desires and attitudes to a power higher than myself which would give me new desires and attitudes.

Here was religion put to me in a different way and presented by three past masters in liquor guzzling. On the strength of their stories I decided to give it a try. And it worked, as long as I allowed it to do so.

After a year of learning new ways of living, new attitudes and desires, I became self-confident and then careless. I suppose you would say I got to feeling too sure of myself and Zowie! First it was a beer on Saturday nights and then it was a fine drunk. I knew exactly what I had done to bring myself to this old grief. I had tried to handle my life on the strength of my own ideas and plans instead of looking to God for the inspiration and the strength.

But I didn't do anything about it. I thought "to hell with everybody. I'm going to do as I please." So I floundered around for seven months refusing help from any quarter. But one day I volunteered to take another drunk on a trip to sober him up. When we got back

286 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

to town we were both drunk and went to a hotel to sober up. Then I began to reason the thing out. I had been a sober, happy man for a year, living decently and trying to follow the will of God. Now I was unshaven, unkept, ill-looking, bleary-eyed. I decided then and there and went back to my friends who offered me help and who never lectured me on my seven month failure.

That was more than a year ago. I don't say now that I can do anything. I only know that as long as I seek God's help to the best of my ability, just so long will liquor never bother me.

287

MY WIFE AND I

COMING from a farm boyhood with the common education of the little red schoolhouse, I had worked during the war and afterwards for seven years at high wages in a booming industrial town, had saved considerable money and finally married an able, well educated woman who had an unusual gift of common sense and far more than the average business vision, a true helpmate in every way.

In our early twenties, we were both ambitious and had boundless faith in our ability to succeed. We talked over the future all the time, exchanged ideas and really planned our way in life. Just working in a factory, even at highly paid piece work, and saving out of my wages, did not seem to us to be the best way to do. We talked things over and decided to strike out for ourselves. Our first venture, a neighborhood grocery store, prospered. Another neighborhood store, in an ideal location at a nearby summer resort, looked good to us. We bought it and started in to make it go. Then came a business slump affecting the whole country. With fewer customers I had lots of time on my hands and was getting to like high powered home brew and the potent liquors of prohibition days entirely too well. That didn't help the business. We finally shut up shop.

Jobs were scarce, but by persistence I again found a factory job. In a few months the factory closed down.

288 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

We had again accumulated a small stake and since the job situation showed no improvement, we thought we would try business again.

This time we opened a restaurant in a semi-rural section and for a time all went well. My wife opened up in the morning, did all the baking and cooking and waited on trade. I relieved her later in the day and stayed open late to catch every possible bit of business. Our place became a regular hang-out for groups of late-comers who showed up with a bottle every now and then.

I told myself that I was one man who could handle my liquor because I was always on my feet at closing time. I talked knowingly about spacing my drinks, about taking only a measured shot, and about the folly of gulping down big drinks. Yes sir, I was never going to be one of those "rummies" who let liquor get the best of them. Young and strong, I could throw off the effects of the previous night's drinking and stand the nausea the following morning, even abstaining from taking a drink until the afternoon. But before long the idea of suffering for a few hours didn't seem so good.

The morning drink became the first act of the daily routine.

I had now become a "regular." I had my regular remedy—a stiff shot to start the day and no waiting till a specified time. I used to wait for the need, soon I was craving the stuff so much that I didn't wait for that. My wife could see that it was gripping me. She warned me, gently at first, with quiet seriousness. Was I going to pave the way to losing this business just when it needed to be nursed along? We began to run behind.

MY WIFE AND I 289

My wife, anxious for the goal we had set out to reach, and seeing the result if I didn't brace up, talked straight from the shoulder. We had words. I left in a passion.

Our separation lasted a week, I did a lot of thinking, and went back to my wife. Quieter, somewhat remorseful, we talked things over. Our situation was worse than I had anticipated. We got a buyer for the place and sold out. We still had some money left.

I had always been a natural mechanic, handy with tools. We moved back into town with a slim bankroll and, still determined never to be a factory hand again, I looked around and finding a workshop location with a house adjacent I started a sheet metal shop. I had chosen a very difficult time to start up. My business practically vanished on account of the depression.

There were no jobs of any kind. We fell far behind on our rent and other obligations. Our cupboard was often bare. With every penny needed for food and shelter, and wearing old clothes with nothing new except what our two youngsters needed, I didn't touch a drop for two years. I went after business. I slugged doorbells all over the town asking for jobs. My wife rang bells with me, taking one side of the street while I worked the other. We left nothing undone to keep going, but we were still far behind, so far that at the low point we could see eviction and our belongings in the street.

I braced myself to talk to our landlord who was connected with a large real estate firm managing many properties. We were behind six months in our rent and they saw that the only way to get their back rent was

290 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

to give me a couple of small jobs. My wife learned to use the tools to shape and fashion material when I was doing the installation work. The real estate firm liked my work and began to give me more jobs. In those grim days, with babies to feed, I couldn't spend what little money came in for drink. I stayed sober. My wife and I even started back to church, began paying our dues.

They were thin years, those depression years. For three years in succession, Christmas in our little family was just the 25th of December. Our customers saw us as two earnest young people trying to get along and as times improved a little we began to get better jobs. Now we could hire some competent workmen and bought a car and a few small trucks. We prospered and moved into a better-equipped house.

My pockets, which hadn't jingled for years, now held folding money. The first greenbacks grew into a roll with a rubber band around it. I became well-known to real estate firms, business men, and politicians. I was well-liked, popular with everyone. Following a prosperous season came a quiet period. With time on our hands I had a drinking spell. It lasted for a month, but with the aid of my wife, I checked myself in time. "Remember how we lost the store! Remember our restaurant!" my wife said. Yes, I could remember. Those times were too recent and their memory too bitter. I solemnly swore off and once more climbed aboard the wagon, this time for nine long months.

Business kept up. It became evident that by careful handling we might eventually have something pretty

MY WIFE AND I 291

good, a sufficient income to provide a good living for us all and ensure a good education for our children.

My business is seasonal. Fall and early winter are rush times. The first few months of the year are quiet. But though business slackened, I got around making contracts, lining up future work and meeting people who would be able to put work in my way. Not yet sensing any great danger, in spite of past experiences, I seldom refused the invitations of business friends to have a drink. In a short time I was drinking every day and eventually much more than I had ever done before for I always had a roll in my pocket.

At first I was even more jolly than usual when I came home in the evening to my wife and family. But the joking good fellow who was the husband and father they had known, gave place to a man who slammed the door when he came in. My wife, genuinely alarmed now as week after week went past with-

out any sign that I was going to quit, tried to reason with me, but the old arguments didn't work this time.

Summer came on with its demand for roof repairs and spouting installations. My wife often started the men to work in the morning, did shop jobs, kept the books, and in addition, ran the house and looked after the family.

For eight months my daily routine was steady drinking. Even after slumping in bed late at night in a semi-stupor, I would get up at all hours and drive to some all-night spot where I could get what I wanted. I was going to have a good time in spite of hell and high water.

I became increasingly surly when at home. I was the

292 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

boss. I was master in my own house, wasn't I? I became morose, with few lucid moments between drinks I would listen to no arguments and certainly attempts to reason with me were futile. Unknown to me, my wife influenced some of my friends and business associates to drop in casually. They were mostly non-drinkers and generally ended up by mildly upbraiding me.

"A fine lot of Job's comforters," I would say. I felt that everybody was against me, thought bitterly of my wife as being of little help and told myself I wasn't getting the breaks, that everybody was making a mountain out of a molehill and so, to hell with everything! I still had money and with money I could always buy bottled happiness. And still my wife kept trying. She got our pastor to talk to me. It was no good.

Drinking and staying drunk without cessation, even my splendid constitution began to give way. My wife called doctors who gave me temporary relief. Then my wife left me after a bitter quarrel, taking the children with her. My pride was hurt and I began to regard myself as an injured husband and an unappreciated father who, deep in his heart, just doted on his children. I went to see her and demanded to see them. I up and told her that I didn't care whether she came back or not, that I wanted the children. My wife, wise woman, thought she still had a chance to have me, save our home for the children. She threw aside her sense of injury, spoke right up to me and said she was coming back, that forbidding her the house wouldn't work, that she had helped me get what I had and was going to cross its threshold and resume its management. She did just that.

MY WIFE AND I 293

When she opened the door she was appalled at the sight of it, curtains down, dishes and utensils unwashed, dirty glasses and empty bottles everywhere.

Every alcoholic reaches the end of the tether some day. For me there came a day when, physically and mentally, I was unable to make my way to a saloon for a drink. I went to bed. I told my wife for the first time that I wanted to quit drinking, but couldn't. I asked her to do something for me; I had never done this before. I realized that I needed help. Somehow in talking with a lady doctor, my wife had heard of another doctor who in some mysterious way had stopped drinking after thirty years and had been successful in helping a few other alcoholics to become sober men. As a last resort, my wife appealed to this doctor, who insisted on a certain situation before he could help; his experience had taught him that unless that situation existed nothing could be done for the alcoholic.

”Does your husband want to stop drinking, or is he merely temporarily uncomfortable? Has he come to the end of the road?” he asked my wife.

She told him that for the first time I had expressed a desire to quit, that I had asked her in desperation to try to do something—anything, to help me stop. He said he would see me the following morning.

With every part of my being craving a drink, I could hardly sit still when I got up to await the visit from the man she had talked to on the phone, but something kept me in the house. I wanted to hear what this fellow had to offer and since he was a medical man I had some pre-conceived notions ready for him when he came. I was

294 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

pretty jittery when my wife opened the door to admit a tall, somewhat brusque professional man who, from his speech, was obviously an Easterner. I don't know what I had expected, but his salutation, designed to shake me up, I can now see, had almost the same effect as the hosing with cold water in a turkish bath.

”I hear you're another 'rummy,'“ he said as he smiled and sat down beside me. I let him talk. Gradually he drew me out until what I did tell him gave him a picture of my experience. And then he put it to me plainly. ”If you are perfectly sure that you want to quit drinking for good, if you are serious about it, if you don't merely wish to get well so that you can take up drinking again at some future date, you can be relieved,“ he said.

I told him that I had never wanted anything as much in my life as to be able to quit using liquor, and I meant every word of it.

”The first thing to do with your husband,“ he said, turning to my wife, ”is to get him to a hospital and have him 'defogged.' I'll make the necessary arrangements.“

He didn't go into any further explanation, not even to my wife. That evening I was in a hospital bed. The next day the doctor called. He told me that several former alcoholics were now dry as a result of following a certain prescribed course of action and that some of them would be in to see me. My wife came to see me faithfully. She, too, had been learning, perhaps more quickly than I was doing, through talking with the doctor who by this time was getting down to brass tacks with me. My friend was the human agency employed

MY WIFE AND I 295

by an all-wise Father to bring me into a pathway of life. It is an easy matter to repeat and orally affirm a faith. Here were these men who visited me and they, like myself, had tried everything else and although it was plain to be seen none of them were perfect, they were living proof that the sincere attempt to follow the cardinal teachings of Jesus Christ was keeping them sober. If it could do that for others, I was resolved to try it, believing it could do something for me also.

I went home after four days, my mind clear, feeling much better physically and, what was far more important, with something better than just will power to aid me. I got to know others of these alcoholics whose human center was my doctor. They came to our home. I met their wives and families. They invited my wife and myself to their homes. I learned that it would be well to begin the day with morning devotion which is the custom in our house now.

It was almost a year when I began to get a little careless. One day I hoisted a few drinks, arriving home far from sober. My wife and I talked it over, both knowing it had happened because I had stopped following the plan. I acknowledged my fault to God and asked His help to keep to the course I had to follow.

Our home is a happy one. My children no longer hide when they see me coming. My business has improved. And—this is important—I try to do what I can for my fellow alcoholics. In our town there are some 70 of us, ready and willing to spend our time to show the way to sobriety and sanity to men who are like what we used to be.

A WARD OF THE PROBATE COURT

AT ABOUT the time of my graduation from high school, a state university was established in our city. On the call for an office assistant, I was recommended by my superintendent, and got the position. I was rather his choice and pride, but a few years later, I met him in a nearby city and "panhandled" him for two "bucks" for drinks.

I grew with this institution and advanced in position.

I took a year off for attendance at an engineering college. At college I refrained from any hilarious celebrating or drinking.

War was declared. I was away from home on business at the State Capitol where my mother couldn't raise objections and I enlisted. Overseas I was on five fronts from Alsace up to the North Sea. Upon relief from the lines—back in the rest area, "vin rouge" and "cognac" helped in the let down from trying circumstances. I was introduced to the exhilaration of intoxication. The old spirit, "What the hell? Heinie may have you tagged," didn't help toward any moderation in drinking then. We had many casualties but one of the real catastrophies was the loss of a pal, a lieutenant who died from the D.T.'s over there, after it was all over. This didn't slow me up and back in the States I had a big fling before returning home.

My plans were to cover up with my mother and the

A WARD OF THE PROBATE COURT 297

girl I was to marry, that I had become addicted to alcohol. But I exposed the fact on the day our engagement was announced. On the way I met a training camp buddy, got drunk and missed the party. Booze had got over its first real blow on me. I saw her briefly that night but didn't have the guts to face her people. The romance was over.

To forget, I engaged in a super-active life in social, fraternal, and civic promotion in my community. This all outside my position in the President's Office of the State University. I became a leader—the big flash in the pan. I organized and was first commander of the American Legion Post—raised funds and built a fine memorial Club House. Was Secretary of Elks, Eagles, Chamber of Commerce, City Club, and active as an operator and officer in political circles. I was always a good fellow and controlled my drinking, indulging only in sprees in private clubs or away from home.

I was deposed from the executive position at the college by a political change in the governorship of the State. I knew the salesmanager of the Securities Division of a large Utility corporation in Wall Street, and started out to sell securities. The issues and the market were good and I had a fine opportunity. I

was away from home and I began to drink heavily. To get away from my drinking associates, I managed to be transferred to another city, but this didn't help. Booze had me, my sales and commissions diminished, I remained almost in a continuous stupor on my drawing account until I was released.

I braced up, got sober, and made a good connection

298 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

with a steamship agency, a concern promoting European travel and study at most all important universities in Europe.

Those were the bath-tub gin days and for drinking in and about my office, I held out in this position for only a year.

I was now engaged to be married and fortunately I got another position as salesman for a large corporation. I worked hard, was successful, and drinking became periodical. I was married and my wife soon learned that I was no social drinker. I tried hard to control it, but could not. There were many separations and she would return home. I would make pledges and a sincere effort and then my top would blow off again. I began here to take sanitarium treatments to satisfy my wife and my folks.

I had a great capacity for drink and work. With the help of turkish baths, bromo-seltzer and aspirin, I held to the job. I became top-notch in the entire sales force of the country. I was assigned to more special territory and finally into the market of keenest competition. I was top rate in salary, won bonus awards and was bringing in the volume. But there was always the drawback my excessive drinking made at times. I was called in once, twice, and warned. Finally I wasn't to be tolerated any longer, although I was doing a good job. I had lasted five and a half years.

I lost my wife along with my job and fine income. This was a terrible jolt. I tried for a hook-up, but I had a black eye marring a good record. I became discouraged and depressed. I sought relief with booze. There began the four black years of my life.

A WARD OF THE PROBATE COURT 299

I had returned home to the community where I had been so prominent. These were dry days still and I hung out at the clubs with bars. I got so I would last on a job but a few days, just until I could get an advance for drinks. I began to get entangled with the law—arrested for driving while intoxicated and drunken and disorderly conduct.

My folks heard of the cure at the State Hospital. I was picked up drunk and sent there by the Probate Court. I was administered paraldehyde and came to in a receiving ward among lunatics. I was transferred to another ward of less violent cases and I found a little group of alcoholics and "junkers" (dope addicts). I learned from them the seriousness of being a ward of the Probate Court. I felt then if I ever got released the old devil alcohol would never get me in a jam like this again. In times of great distress such as this, I would pray to God for help.

I was fortunate and was released after eleven days and nights barred up in the laughing academy—"bug-house." That was enough. I wanted no more of it. I took a job as manager of a club and put myself to the old acid test. I was going to really assert my will power. I even tended bar part of the time, but never imbibed a bit. This lasted about three months.

I went to an annual convention of my overseas division and came to locked up in a cheap hotel room, new shoes, suit coat, hat and purse missing. I must have slipped badly.

Then followed much drinking and trouble. After a few arrests for intoxication, the law decided another so-

300 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

jour to the State Hospital would tame me. They jumped the stay this time from eleven days to eleven weeks. It was getting tough for me. I came out in good physical condition and held a fear of getting probated again, thinking the seige might be eleven months. I got another job and stayed dry for about two months and off to the races again.

I became terribly weak—couldn't eat and tried to get nourishment from booze and mostly only bootleg at that. One time, I just made it into a hospital and another time a police patrol took me to the hospital instead of the jail. I suffered badly from insomnia. As many as three shots in the arm had no effect.

I would get in shape and back at it again. I was going to battle it to the finish. The time came when I was to be paid my soldier's bonus. I had the limit or maximum coming. Friends advised my folks to send me to a Veterans Hospital before I got this money in my hands. I was probated again, held in a county jail for two weeks and sent again to the asylum. This was my summer resort for three months. I was on the waiting list for the Veterans Hospital but I got into such wonderful physical condition from eating and working out of doors that I was released.

I reached home full of resentment against my folks for their having my money tied up under a guardianship. I went out and got saturated and landed in jail—I had been free from the asylum about eight hours. Behind the bars again so soon—this was bad. However, I was freed again next day and this was my last confine-

A WARD OF THE PROBATE COURT 301

ment with the law. I began to use my head, I continued to drink but kept under cover or hid in the "jungles" with the bums.

In a few months an old friend came along. He located me a few times in saloons. We had been drinking pals in the early days, particularly at the club houses. He had heard of my predicament. He himself had quit drinking and looked fine. He encouraged me to visit him in a nearby city.

I wanted to quit drinking, but hadn't much faith in ever getting away from it. I agreed to go into a hospital as the patient of a doctor who had been an alcoholic for many years and was now a new man.

It is almost uncanny—in just eight days I left there a different person. This doctor in plain words was a wonderful guy—he spent many hours with me telling me his experience with alcohol. Others of his band, which was then small, visited me—told me their stories. They were all strangers to me, but treated me as a friend. I was impressed with their interest and fellowship. I learned the secret. They had a religious experience. I was willing, and renewed my acquaintance with God and acknowledged Him as a reality.

I found it easy. I came to life and have been free now for two years. I hope never to take another drink. I am building up a reputation again and nearly every day am complimented on my appearance.

I have a new outlook on life. I look forward to each day with happiness because of the real enjoyment it is to me to be sane, sober, and respectable. I was existing

302 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

really from one drink until the next, with no perception about circumstances, conditions, or even nature's elements. My acquaintance with God—lost and forgotten when I was a young man—is renewed. God is all-loving and all-forgiving. The memories of my past are being dimmed by the life I now aspire to.

303

RIDING THE RODS

FOURTEEN years old and strong, I was ready—an American Whittington who knew a better way to get places than by walking. The "clear the way" whistle of a fast freight thundering over the crossing on the tracks a mile away was a siren call. Sneaking away from my farm home one night, I made my way to the distant yards. Ducking along a lane between two made-up trains that seemed endless, I made my way to the edge of the yards. Here and there I passed a silent, waiting figure. Then a little group talking among themselves. Edging in, I listened eagerly. I had met my first hoboes. They talked of places I had never heard of. This town was good. A fellow could get by on the Bowery all winter if he knew the ropes; that other town was "hostile"; thirty days for "vag" awaited you in another if you didn't hit the cinders before the road "bulls" fine-combed the train.

Then they noticed me. Somehow a new kid is always an object of interest to the adventurers of the rails. "Where ye makin' for, Kid?"

I had heard one of them mention "Detroit" and it seemed as good an answer as any. I had no plans, just wanted to get away—anywhere—just away!

"That Michigan Manifest will be along any minute now; I think she's moving." The tall hobo who had

304 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

spoken grabbed me by the arm. "Come on, kid. We'll help you."

Suddenly I felt big. I had gotten away! The two hoboes talked, the tall one about getting work in Detroit, the other arguing for staying on the road. Then the one who had boosted me up began to quiz me. I told him I had run away from the farm. In a sort of halting way he told me not to get the train habit or it would get me until I would always want to be moving. The rocking motion of the car as the train increased speed became a cradle song in my ears. I fell asleep.

It was way past dawn when I awoke. My two companions were already sitting up and talking. The day wore on. We passed through small towns. Soon the train was threading its way between factories and huge warehouses, crossing tracks with brisk clatter, coming into a large railway yard. Brakes went on. They helped me off. We were in Detroit.

My hobo friends parted at a street corner. The tall one took me along right into town and got a room for both of us with "Mother Kelly," a kindly Irish landlady if there ever was one. "Sit tight, kid," he said. "I'll see you through as much as I can. Me to find a job."

He got a job. For almost two years he looked after me. He was always vigilant, steering me past the snares and pitfalls that are always in the path of a growing boy. This hobo, Tom Casey, who never talked much about himself or his experience except as a warning illustration of "What not to do," made me start a bank account and keep it growing. It is to him I owe the fact that I didn't become a "road kid," that I never became a

RIDING THE RODS 305

hobo. Came a day when he left me. The road was calling him, he explained, although that never seemed to me to be the reason. I never saw Tom Casey again, but from this man I received my first lesson in the guiding and compelling principle of the Good Life. "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

I was city-wise by this time, uncontaminated to be sure, thanks to my friend. No longer a "boy rube in the big town." I found a job quickly enough but I missed Tom. I began to hang around pool rooms and it was inevitable that I soon learned to handle a schooner of beer and an occasional "shot." Jobs were plentiful. If I didn't feel right in the morning after a night with the "corner gang" I didn't go to work. I lost jobs. My bank account dwindled, disappeared entirely. My new barroom friends were little help. I was broke.

It was summer and the park benches, hard and uncomfortable as they were, appealed to me more than the squalid "flops" of the city's slums. So I slept out a few nights. Young and full of energy, I hunted for work. The war was on and work was easy to get. I became a machine-shop hand, progressing rapidly from drill-press to milling machine to lathe. I could quit a job one day and have a new one the next with more money. Soon I again had a good boarding-house, clothes and money. But I never started another bank account. "Plenty of time for that," I thought. My week-ends were spent in my conception of "a good time," finally becoming regular carousals and debauches over Saturday and Sunday. I had the usual experiences of being slipped a "Mickey Finn" and getting slugged and rolled for my money.

306 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

These had no deterrent effect. I could always get jobs and live comfortably again in a few weeks. Soon, however, I tired of the weary routine of working and drinking. I began to dislike the city. Somehow my boyhood days on the farm didn't seem to be so bad at a distance.

No, I didn't go home, but found work not too far away. I still drank. I soon got restless and took a freight for a Michigan city, arriving there broke late at night. I set out to look for friends. They helped me find work. Slowly I began to climb the industrial job ladder once more and eventually achieved a responsible position as a machine setter in a large plant. I was sitting on top of the world again. The sense of accomplishment I had now told me that I had earned the right to have enjoyable week-ends once more. The week-ends began to extend to Tuesday and Wednesday until I frequently worked only from Thursday to Saturday with the bottle always in my mind. In a vague sort of way I had set a time to quit drinking but that was at least fifteen years away and "What the hell!" I said to myself. "I'm going to have a good time while I'm young."

Then I was fired. Piqued, I drank up my last pay check and when I got sober again found another job--then another--and another in quick succession. I was soon back on the park benches. And once more I got a break when everything seemed dark. An old friend volunteered to get me a job driving a bus. He said

he would buy me a uniform and give me the hospitality of his home if I would promise to quit drinking. Of course I promised. I had been working about three

RIDING THE RODS 307

days when the bus line superintendent called me into his office.

Young fellow," he said, "In your application you stated that you don't use alcoholic liquors. Now, we always check a man's references and three of the firms you have worked for say you're a highly capable man, but you have the drink habit."

I looked at him. It was all true, I admitted, but I had been out of work such a long time that I had welcomed this job as an opportunity to redeem myself. I told him what I had promised my friend, that I was sincerely doing my best and not drinking a drop. I asked him to give me a chance.

"Somehow I think you are in earnest," he said. "I believe you mean it. I'll give you a chance and help you to make good."

He shook my hand in friendship and encouragement. I strode from his office with high hope. "John Barleycorn will never make a bum out of me again," I told myself with determination.

For three months I drove my route steadily with never a hitch. My employers were satisfied. I felt pretty good. I was really on the wagon this time, wasn't I?

Yes indeed, I was on the wagon for good.

I soon repaid my debt to my friend for his stake in me and even saved a little money. The feeling of security increased. It was summer and, hot and tired at the end of the day, I began to stop in at a speakeasy on my way home. Detroit beer was good then, almost like old-time prohibition stuff. "This is the way to

308 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

do it," I would say to myself. "Stick to beer. After all, it's really a food and it sure hits the spot after a trick of wheeling that job around in this man's town. It's the hard liquor that gets a man down. Beer for mine."

Even then with all the hard lessons of bitter experience behind me I did not realize that thinking along that line was a definite red light on my road in life—a real danger signal.

The evening glass of beer led, as usual, to the night when I didn't get away from the bar until midnight. I began to need a bracer in the morning. Beer, I knew from experience was simply no good as a bracer—all right as a thirst quencher perhaps, but lacking action and authority the next morning.

I needed a jolt.

The morning jolt became a habit. Then it got to be several jolts until I was generally pretty well organized when I started to work. Spacing my drinks over the day I managed not to appear drunk, just comfortable, as I drove along the crowded thoroughfares of the city. Then came the accident.

On one of the avenues a man darted from between parked cars right in my path. I swung the bus sharply over to keep from hitting him but couldn't quite make it. He died in the hospital. Passenger and sidewalk witnesses absolved me completely. Even if I had been completely sober I couldn't have cleared him. The company investigation immediately after the accident showed me blameless but my superiors knew I had been drinking. They fired me—not for the accident-but for drinking on the job.

Well, once more I felt I had enough of city life and

found a job on an upstate farm. While there I met a young school-teacher, fell in love with her and she with me. We were married. Farm work was not very remunerative for a young couple so we went successively to Pontiac, Michigan and later to an industrial city in Ohio. For economy's sake we had been living with my wife's people, but somehow we never seemed able to get ahead. I was still drinking but not so much as formerly, or so it seemed to me.

The new location seemed ideal—no acquaintances, no entanglements, no boon companions to entice me. I made up my mind to leave liquor alone and get ahead. But I forgot one boon companion, one who was always at my elbow, one who followed me from city to farm and back to city. I had forgotten about John Barleycorn.

Even so, the good resolutions held for a time—new job, comfortable home, and understanding helpmate, they all helped. We had a son and soon came another. We began to make friends and moved in a small social circle of my fellow workers and their wives and families. Those were still bootleg days. Drinks were always available but nobody seemed to get very drunk. We just had a good time, welcome surcease after a week of toil. Here were none of the rowdy debauches that I had known, I had discovered "social drinking" how to "drink like a gentleman and hold my liquor." There is no point in reiterating the recurrence of experience already described. The "social drinking" didn't hold up. I became the bootlegger's first morning customer. How I ever managed to hold the job I had I don't know.

310 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

I began to receive the usual warnings from my superiors.

They had no effect. I had now come to an ever deepening realization that I was a drunkard, that there was no help for me.

I told my wife that. She sought counsel of her friends and my friends. They came and talked with me. Reverend gentlemen, who knew nothing of my problem, pointed me to the age-old religious formula. I would have none of it. It left me cold. Now, with hope gone, I haunted the mean thoroughfares of speak-easy districts, with my mind on nothing but the next drink. I managed to work enough to maintain a slim hold on my job. Then I began to reason with myself.

"What good are you?" I would say. "Your wife and children would be better off if they never saw you again. Why don't you get away and never come back? Let them forget about you. Get away—get away anywhere—that's the thing to do."

That night, coatless and hatless, I hopped a freight for Pittsburgh. The following day I walked the streets of the Smoky City. I offered to work at a roadside stand for a meal. I got the meal, walked on, sat down by the roadside to think.

"What a heel I've turned out to be!" I soliloquized. "My wife and two kids back there—no money—what can they do? I should have another try at it. Maybe I'll never get well, but at least I can earn a dollar or two now and then—for them."

I took another freight back home. Despite my absence, my job was still open. I went to work, but it was no go. I would throw a few dollars at my wife on pay-

day and drink up what was left. I hated my surroundings, hated my job, my fellow-workers—the whole town. I tried Detroit again, landing there with a broken arm. How I got it I'll never know for I was far gone in drink when I left. My wife's relatives returned me to my home in a few days. I became morose, mooning around the house by myself. Seeing me come home, my wife would leave a little money on the table, grab the children and flee. I was increasingly ugly. Now, all hope was gone entirely. I made several attempts on my life. My wife had to hide any knives and hammers. She feared for her own safety. I feared for my mind—feared that I was breaking—that I would end up insane. Finally the fear got so terrible that I asked my wife to have me "put away" legally. There came a morning when, alone in my room, I began to wreck it, breaking the furniture, destroying everything in sight. Desperate, my wife had to employ the means I had suggested to her in the depths of alcoholic despair. Loath to have me committed to the state asylum, still trying to save something from the wreckage of my life and hers, she had me placed in a hospital, hoping against hope to save me.

I was placed under restraint. The treatment was strenuous—no alcohol—just bromides and sleeping positions. The nights were successions of physical and mental agony. It was weeks before I could sit still for any length of time. I didn't want to talk to anyone and cared less to listen. That gradually wore off and one day I fell into casual conversation with another patient—another alcoholic. We began to compare notes. I

312 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

told him frankly that I was in despair, that no thinking I had ever been able to do had shown me a way of escape, that all my attempts to try will power (well meaning persons had often said, "Why don't you use your will power?"—as if will power were a faculty one could turn on and off like a faucet!) had been of no avail.

"Being in here and getting fixed up temporarily," I told him bitterly, "is no good. I know that only too well. I can see nothing but the same old story over again. I'm simply unable to quit. When I get out of here I'm going to blow town."

My fellow patient and new found acquaintance looked at me a long time in silence and finally spoke. From the most unexpected quarter in the world, from a man who was in the same position I was in, from a fellow alcoholic, came the first ray of hope I had seen.

"Listen fellow," he said, looking at me with ten times the earnestness of the many good citizens and other wellintentioned persons who had tried their best to help me. "Listen to me. I know a way out. I know the only answer. And I know it works."

I stared at him in amazement. There were several mild mental cases in the place and, little as I knew about their exhibitions of tendencies, I knew that even in a normal conversation, strange ideas might be expected. Was this fellow perhaps a little balmy—a wee bit off? Here was a man, an admitted alcoholic like myself, trying to tell me he knew the remedy for my situation. I wanted to hear what he had to suggest but made the reservation that he was probably a little "nutty." At the same time

I was ready to listen, like any drowning man, to grasp at even a straw.

My friend smiled, he knew what I was thinking. "Yes," he continued. "Forget that I'm here. Forget that I'm just another 'rummy.' But I had the answer once—the only answer."

He seemed to be recalling his very recent past. Looking at me earnestly, his voice impressive in its sincerity, he went on. "For more than a year before coming here I was a sober man, thoroughly dry. I wasn't just on the wagon. I was dry! And I would still be dry if I had stuck to the plan which kept me sober all that time."

Let me say here that he later went back to the very plan he told me about and has since been sober for more than a year for the second time.

He told me his own story briefly and went on to tell me of a certain cure for alcoholism—the only certain cure. I had anticipated hearing of some new treatment, some newly discovered panacea that I had not heard of, something which no doubt combined drugs and mental healing. But it was neither one nor the other; it was certainly not a mixture of any kind.

He spoke of some 30 men in my town who were ready to take me by the hand and call me by my first name. They would be friends without canting or ranting. He told me they met once a week to talk over their experiences, how they tried to help each other, how they spent their time in helping men like me.

"I know it sounds strange, incredible, maybe," he said. "I slipped, got drunk after being sober for a year, but I'm going back to try again. I know it works."

314 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Helpless, without faith in myself or anyone else, entirely doubtful that the fellow really had something, I began to ask questions. I had to be interested or go crazy.

"How do you go about this—where do I have to go?" I asked.

"You don't have to go anywhere," he said. "Someone will come to you if you want them to." He didn't go into any detail, just told me that much and little more. I did some thinking that afternoon. Calling one of the nurses I asked her to get in touch with my wife and have her come to see me that evening.

She came during visiting hours. She expected, I know, to hear me plead for instant release from the place. I didn't talk about that. In my lame way I told her the story. It made little impression.

"It doesn't sound right," she said. "If this plan—and for the life of me I don't quite get it from what you've told me—if this plan is successful, why is this fellow back here himself?"

I was stumped. I was too ignorant about the thing myself to be capable of explaining it clearly to her. "I don't know," I said. "I'll admit it sounds queer, the way this fellow is and all that, but somehow I feel there's something to it. Anyhow, I want to know more about it."

She went away skeptically. But the next day I had a visitor, a doctor who had been himself an alcoholic. He told me little more about the plan. He was kindly, didn't offer any cut and dried formula to overcome my life-long difficulty. He presented no religious nostrums,

suggested no saving rituals. Later he sent some of the other ex-alcoholics to see me.

A few days later my fellow alcoholic was released, and shortly afterward I was allowed to go home also. Through the man who had first told me of the plan I was introduced to several other former alcoholics. They told me their experiences. Many were men of former affluence and position. Some had hit even lower levels than I had.

The first Wednesday evening after my release found me a somewhat shame-faced but intensely curious attendant at a gathering in a private home in this city. Some forty others were present. For the first time I saw a fellowship I had never known in actual operation. I could actually feel it. I learned that this could be mine, that I could win my way to sobriety and sanity if I would follow a few precepts, simple in statement, but profound and far reaching in their effect if followed. It penetrated to my inner consciousness that the mere offering of lip service wasn't enough. Still ignorant, still a little doubting, but in deadly earnest, I made up my mind to make an honest effort to try.

That was two years ago. The way has not been easy. The new way of living was strange at first, but all my thoughts were on it. The going was sometimes slow; halting were my steps among the difficulties of the path. But always, when troubles came, when doubts assailed and temptation was strong and the old desire returned, I knew where to go for aid. Helping others also strengthened me and helped me to grow.

Today I have achieved, through all these things, a

316 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

measure of happiness and contentment I had never known before. Material success has mattered little. But I know that my wants will be taken care of.

I expect to have difficulties every day of my life, I expect to encounter stops and hindrances, but now there is a difference. I have a new and tried foundation for every new day.

THE SALESMAN

I LEARNED to drink in a workmanlike manner when the law of the land said I couldn't and what started out as a young man's fun became a habit which in its later existence laid me by the heels many a time and almost finished my career.

'Teen years were uneventful with me. I was raised on a farm but saw little future in farming. I was going to be a business man, took a business college course, acquired a truck and stand in the city market of a nearby town, and started off. I brought produce from my folks' place and sold it to city customers and there were plenty of them with bulging pocketbooks.

Back of me was the normal life of a farmer's son. My parents were unusually understanding people. My father was a lifelong comrade till the day of his death. The business theory I had learned in college was now being practiced and I was equipped beyond many of my competitors to be materially successful. Soon I had expanded until I was represented in all the city markets and also in another city. In 1921 we had the forerunner of the later depression and my customers disappeared. Successively I had to close my stands and was

finally wiped out altogether. Being a young man of affairs, I had begun to do a little business and social drinking and now with time on my hands, I seemed to do more of it.

Following a year of factory work, during which time

318 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

I got married, I got a job with a grocer as clerk. My grocer-employer was an expert wine-maker and I had free access to his cellar. The work was monotonous in the extreme, behind a counter all day when I had been used to driving around attending to business, meeting people and building for what I thought was a great future. I mark, too, as a milestone, the death of my father, whom I missed greatly.

I kept hitting the wine, with just occasional use of liquor.

Leaving the grocery I went back into the produce business and out among people, went back to liquor again and got my first warning to quit before it got me.

I was anxious to get with a concern which would give me an opportunity to build up again, and landed a job with a nationally known biscuit company. I was assigned to a good business region, covering several important towns, and almost at once began to earn real money. In a very short time I was the star salesman of the company, winning a reputation as a business-getter. Naturally I drank with my better customers for on my route I had many stops where that was good business. But I had things rather well under control and in the early days on this job I seldom wound up my day's work with any visible effects of drinking.

I had a private brewery at home which was now producing 15 allons a week most of which I drank myself. It is typical of the attitude I had toward alcohol at that time that, when a fire threatened total destruction of my home and garage, I rushed to the cellar and rescued my most precious possessions—a keg of wine and all the

THE SALESMAN 319

beer I could carry, and got pretty indignant when my better half suggested that I had better get some of the needed effects out of the house before it burned down.

My home brewing gradually became a bore and I began to carry home bottles of powerful bootleg whiskey, starting with half a pint every night and winding up with a quart as my daily after supper allowance. For a time I kept on the job spacing my drinks en route and very little of them in the morning hours. I just couldn't wait until I got home to drink. In a very short time I became an all-day drinker.

Chain-store managers and quantity buyers were both my guests and hosts and every now and then we had prodigious parties. Finally, in a re-organization shake-up resulting in new district managers with a pretty poor territory deal for me, I gave the company two weeks notice and quit. I had bought a home but in the year and a half following I had little income and finally lost that. I became satisfied with just enough to live on and buy the liquor I wanted. Then I landed in the hospital when my car was hit by a truck. My car was ruined entirely. That loss and my injuries plus the recriminations of my wife sort of sobered me up. When I got out of the hospital I stayed sober for six weeks and had made up my mind to quit.

I went back in the business where I had been a successful salesman, but with another company. When I started with this concern I talked things over with my wife and made her some very solemn promises. I wasn't going to touch another drop of liquor.

By this time prohibition was a thing of the past and

320 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

saloons and clubs where I was well known as a good customer and a good spender became my patrons. I rolled up business until I was again a star, but after the first four months on the new job I began to slip. It is not unusual in the drinking experience of any man that after a time of sobriety he comes to the conclusion that he "can handle it." In no time at all liquor again became the most important thing in my life and every day became like another, steady drinking in every saloon and club on my route. I would get to headquarters every night in a top-heavy condition, just able to maintain equilibrium. I began to get warnings and was repeatedly fired and taken on again. My wife's parents died about this time in unfortunate circumstances. All my troubles seemed to be piling up on me and liquor was the only refuge I knew.

Some nights I wouldn't go home at all and when I did go home I was displeased when my wife had supper ready and equally angry when she didn't. I didn't want to eat at all and frequently when I underestimated my consumption of the amount of liquor I brought home, I made extra trips back to town to renew the supply. My morning ration when I started out was five double whiskies before I could do any business at all. I would go into a saloon, trembling like a leaf, tired in appearance and deathly sick, I would down two double whiskies, feel the glow and become almost immediately transformed. In half an hour I would be able to navigate pretty well and start out on my route. My daily reports became almost illegible and finally, following arrest for driving while intoxicated and on my job at that, I got

THE SALESMAN 321

scared and stayed sober for several days. Not long afterward I was fired for good.

My wife suggested I go to my old home in the country, which I did. Continued drinking convinced my wife I was a hopeless case and she entered suit for divorce. I got another job, but didn't stop drinking. I kept on working although my physical condition was such as to have required extensive hospitalization. For years I hadn't had a peaceful night's sleep and never knew a clear head in the morning. I had lost my wife, and had become resigned to going to bed some night and never waking again.

Every drunkard has one or two friends who haven't entirely given up hope for him, but I came to the point where I had none. That is, none but my Mother, and she, devoted soul, had tried everything with me. Through her, people came to me and talked, but nothing they said—some were ministers and others good church members—helped me a particle. I would agree with them when they were with me and as fast as they went away, I'd go after my bottle. Nothing suggested to me seemed to offer a way out.

I was getting to a place where I wanted to quit drinking but didn't know how. My Mother heard of a doctor who had been having marked success with alcoholics. She asked me if I'd like to talk to him and I agreed to go with her.

I had known, of course, of the various cures and after we had discussed the matter of my drinking fairly thoroughly, the doctor suggested that I go into the local hospital for a short time. I was very skeptical, even

322 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

after the doctor hinted there was more to his plan than medical treatment. He told me of several men whom I knew who had been relieved and invited me to meet a few of them who got together every week. I promised I would be on deck at their next meeting but told him I had little faith in any hospital treatments. Meeting night, I was as good as my word and met the small group. The doctor was there but somehow I felt quite outside of the circle. The meeting was informal, nevertheless I was little impressed. It is true they did no psalm singing, nor was there any set ritual, but I just didn't care for anything religious. If I had thought of God at all in the years of drinking, it was with a faint idea that when I came to die I would sort of fix things up with Him.

I say that the meeting did not impress me. However, I could see men whom I had known as good, hard-working drunkards apparently in their right minds, but I just couldn't see where I came into the picture. I went home, stayed sober for a few days, but was soon back to my regular quota of liquor every day.

Some six months later, after a terrific binge, in a maudlin and helpless state, I made my way to the doctor's home. He gave me medical treatment and had me taken to the home of one of my relatives. I told him I had come to the point where I was ready for the remedy, the only remedy. He sent two of the members to see me. They were both kindly to me, told me what they had gone through and how they had overcome their fight with liquor. They made it very plain that I had to seek God, that I had to state my case to Him and ask

THE SALESMAN 323

for help. Prayer was something I had long forgotten. I think my first sincere utterance must have sounded pretty weak. I didn't experience any sudden change, and the desire for liquor wasn't taken away overnight, but I began to enjoy meeting these people and began to exchange the liquor habit for something that has helped me in every way. Every morning I read a part of the Bible and ask God to carry me through the day safely.

There is another part I want to talk about—a very important part. I think I would have had much more difficulty in getting straightened out if I hadn't been almost immediately put to work. I don't mean getting back on my job as salesman. I mean something that is necessary to my continued happiness. While I was still shakily trying to rebuild my job of selling, the doctor sent me to see another alcoholic who was in the hospital. All the doctor asked me to do was tell my story. I told it, not any too well perhaps, but as simply and as earnestly as I knew how.

I've been sober for two years, kept that way by submitting my natural will to the Higher Power and that is all there is to it. That submission wasn't just a single act, however. It became a daily duty; it had to be that. Daily I am renewed in strength and I have never come to the point where I have wanted to say, "Thanks God, I think I can paddle my own canoe now," for which I am thankful.

I have been reunited with my wife, making good in business, and paying off debts as I am able. I wish I could find words to tell my story more graphically. My former friends and employers are amazed and see in

me a living proof that the remedy I have used really works. I have been fortunate to be surrounded with friends ever ready to help, but I firmly believe any man can get the same result if he will sincerely work at it God's way.

FIRE AGAIN

IT SEEMS to me that I never did do things normally. When I learned to dance I had to go dancing every night in the week if possible; when I worked or studied I wanted no interruptions or distractions. Wherever I worked I wanted to be the highest paid man in the place or I was irritated; and of course when I drank I could never seem to stop until I was saturated. I was usually hard to get along with as a boy; if the others wouldn't play my way I'd go home.

The town we lived in when I was a child was rather new and raw, peopled largely by immigrants who seemed to be constantly getting married with free drinks and eats for anybody who cared to come. We kids usually managed to get to these celebrations, and although supposed to have soda pop we could get ourselves one or two beers. With this sort of background and more money than was good for me, it was fairly easy to start getting drunk before I was sixteen.

After I left home I earned rather decent salaries but was never satisfied with my position, salary, or the treatment accorded me by my employer. I very seldom stayed on one job for more than six months until I was married at the age of 28, at which time I had already begun to lose jobs because of my drinking. Whenever things went wrong I knew that a few drinks would make everything rosy, my fears, doubts and worries

326 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

would vanish and I would always promise myself that the next time I would stop short of getting plastered. Somehow things seldom worked out that way though.

I was irritated by the efforts of so many doctors, ministers, lawyers, employers, relatives and friends who remonstrated with me, none of whom knew from personal experience what I was up against. I'd fall down, get up, work a while, get my debts paid (at least the most pressing ones) drink moderately for a few days or weeks, but eventually get myself so messed up in tangle-foot that I'd lose another job. In one year (1916) I quit two jobs because I thought I'd be discharged anyhow and was fired outright from five more, which is more jobs than many men have in a lifetime. Had I remained sober, any one of them would have led to advancement because they were with growing companies and in my chosen field of engineering.

After being discharged for the fifth time that year, I drank more than ever, cadging drinks and meals where I could, and running up a large rooming-house account. My brother took me home and my folks talked me into going to a sanitarium for thirty days. This place was operated by a physician who was a personal friend of the family and I was his only patient at the time. The doctor did his best, saw that I got into good physical condition, tried to straighten out the mental quirks he thought partly responsible for my drinking, and I left with the firm resolve never to drink again.

Before I left the sanitarium I answered an advertisement for an engineer in a small Ohio town and after an interview, obtained the position. In three days after

leaving the sanitarium I had a job I liked at a satisfactory salary in a small town with basic living costs (board, room and laundry) amounting only to about 15% of my salary. I was all set, sober, working in a congenial atmosphere for a firm that had more profitable business than they knew what to do with. I made some beautiful plans. I could save enough in a few years to complete my formal education and there were no saloons in the town to trip me up. So what? So at the end of the week I was drunk again for no particular reason at all that I could understand. In about three months I was out of a job again, but in the meantime two things of major importance had happened. I had fallen in love and war had been declared.

I had learned my lesson. I knew definitely that I couldn't take even one drink. I wanted to get married so I planned very earnestly to get another job, stay sober, and save some money. I went to Pittsburgh on Sunday, called on a manufacturer of rolling-mill equipment and on Monday, got a position and went to work. I was first paid at the end of the second week, was drunk before the end of the day and couldn't be bothered with going to work the next Monday.

Why did I take that first drink? I honestly don't know.

Anyhow I nearly went crazy that summer and really developed some sort of mental disturbance. The night clerk of the small hotel where I was staying saw me go out about three in the morning in pajamas and slippers and had a policeman take me back into my room. I suppose he was used to screwy drunks or he would have taken me to jail instead. I stayed there a

328 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

few days and sweated the alcohol out of my system, went to the office to collect the balance of my salary, paid my room rent, and found I had just enough money to get home. So home I went, sick, broke, discouraged and despairing of ever attaining a normal, happy life.

After two or three weeks of idleness at home, I obtained a subordinate position with a former employer, doing the lowest grade of drafting work on an hourly basis. I kept reasonably sober for several months, went to see my fiancée one or two weekends, was advanced rapidly in salary and responsibility, had a date set for the wedding and then inadvertently learned that one of the men working under my direction was receiving about forty dollars more per month than I was, which burnt me up to such an extent I quit after an argument, took my money, packed my personal effects, left them at the corner drug store, and went downtown and got plastered. Knowing that I would be greeted with tears, sorrowful sympathy and more grief when I got home, I stayed away until I was again destitute.

I was really worried sick about my drinking so father again advanced the money for treatment. This time I took a threeday cure and left with the firm resolve never to drink again, got a better position than I'd had before and actually did keep sober for several months, saved some money, paid my debts and again made plans to get married. But the desire for a drink was with me constantly after the first week or two, and the memory of how sick I had been from liquor and the agonies of the treatment I had undergone faded into the background. I had only begun to restore the confidence of

my associates, family, friends and myself before I was off again without any excuse this time. The wedding was again postponed and it looked very much as though it would never take place. My employer did not turn me loose but I was in another nice jam nevertheless. After considerable fumbling around mentally as to what to do I went back to the threeday cure for the second time.

After this treatment I got along a little better, was married in the spring of 1919 and did very little drinking for several years. I got along very well with my work, had a happy home life, but when away from home with little likelihood of being caught at it, I'd go on a mild binge. The thought of what would happen if my wife caught me drinking served to keep me reasonably straight for several years. My work became increasingly more important. I had many outside interests and drinking became less of a factor in my life, but I did continue to tiddle some during my outof-town trips and it was because of this tendency that things finally became all snarled up at home.

I was sent to New York on business and later stopped at a night club where I had been drunk before. I certainly must have been very tight and it is quite likely that I was "Mickey Finned" for I woke up about noon the next day in my hotel without a cent. I had to borrow money to get home on but didn't bother to start back till several days later. When I got there I found a sick child, a distracted wife and had lost another job paying \$7,000 a year. This, however, was not the worst of it. I must have given my business card to one of the girls

330 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

at the night club for she started to send me announcements of another clip-joint where she was employed and writing me long hand "come on" notes, one of which fell into my wife's hands. I'll leave what happened after that to the reader's imagination.

I went back into the business of getting and losing jobs and eventually got to the point where I didn't seem to have any sense of responsibility to myself or to my family. I'd miss important family anniversaries, forget to come home for Christmas and in general wouldn't go home until I was exhausted physically and flat broke. About four years ago I didn't come home on Christmas Eve but arrived there about six o'clock on Christmas morning, minus the tree I had promised to get, but with an enormous package of liquor on board. I took the three-day cure again with the usual results but about three weeks later I went to a party and decided a few beers wouldn't hurt me; however I didn't get back to work for three days and a short while later had lost my job and was again at the bottom of things. My wife obtained employment on a relief basis and I finally got straightened out with my employer who placed me in another position in a nearby city which I also lost by the end of the year.

So it went until about a year ago when a neighbor happened to hear me trying to get into the house and asked my wife whether I had been having some drinking difficulties. This, of course, disturbed my wife but our neighbor was not just inquisitive. She had heard of the work of an ex-alcoholic doctor who was busily engaged in passing on the benefits he had received from another

FIREG AGAIN 331

who had found the answer to his difficulties with liquor. As a result of this my wife saw the doctor. Then I talked with him, spent a few days in a local hospital and haven't had a drink since.

While in the hospital about twenty men called on me and told me of their experiences and the help they had received. Of the twenty I happened to know five, three of whom I had never seen completely sober. I became convinced then and there that if these men had learned something that could keep them sober, I also could profit from the same knowledge. Before leaving the hospital, two of these men, convinced of my sincerity of purpose, imparted to me the necessary knowledge and mental tools which have resulted in my complete sobriety for thirteen months, and an assurance that I need never, so long as I live, drink anything of an alcoholic nature if I kept on the right track.

My health is better, I enjoy a fellowship which gives me a happier life than I have ever known, and my family joins me in a daily expression of gratitude.

THE FEARFUL ONE

WHEN I was 21, I was taken suddenly and violently ill and was ill for seven years. As a result of this illness I was left with a poorish nervous system and a curious phobia. As this has a large place in my story, I will try to explain it clearly. After I had been ill some months, I grew strong enough to get out of doors a little each day, but found I couldn't get farther than the nearest corner without becoming totally panic stricken. As soon as I turned back home the panic would vanish. I gradually overcame this particular phase of the trouble by setting myself longer distances to walk each day. Similarly I learned later to take short street car rides, then longer ones, and so forth, until I appeared to be doing most of the things other people do daily. But the things I did not have to do each day, or at least frequently, remained unconquered and a source of great but secret embarrassment to me.

So I went on for years, planning always to sidestep the things I was afraid of, but concealing my fear from everyone. Those years of illness were not all total invalidism. I made a good living part of the time, but was continually falling down and having to get up and start over again. The whole process gave me a licked feeling, especially when, towards the end of my twenties, I had to give up the presidency of a small company which was just turning the corner to real success.

THE FEARFUL ONE 333

Shortly after this, I was successfully operated on and became a physically well man. But the surgeon did not remove the phobia, that remained with me.

During the period of my illness I was not especially interested in liquor. I was not a teetotaler, but I was just a "social drinker." However, when I was about thirty, my mother died. I went to pieces as I had become very dependent on my parents through my illness. When I began to get on my feet again I discovered that whiskey was a fine relief from the terrific nervous headaches I had developed. Long after the headaches were gone, however, I kept discovering other difficulties for which whiskey was a grand cure. During the ensuing ten years I once, by sheer will power, remained dry for five weeks.

I had many business opportunities during those ten years which, although I tried to keep them in my grasp, slipped through my fingers. A lovely wife came and went. She tried her best and our baby's birth put me on my mettle for all of six months, but after that, worse and more of it. When my wife finally took the baby and left, did I square my shoulders and go to work to prove to

her and to the world that I was a man? I did not. I stayed drunk for a solid month.

The next two years were simply a drawn-out process of less and less work and more and more liquor. They ended eventually at the home of a very dear friend whose family were out of town. I had been politely but firmly kicked out of the house where I had been boarding, and although I seemed to be able to find

334 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

money to buy drinks with, I couldn't find enough to pay advance room rent anywhere.

One night, sure my number was up, I chucked my "pride" and told this friend a good deal of my situation. He was a man of considerable means and he might have done what many men would have done in such a case. He might have handed me fifty dollars and said that I ought to pull myself together and make a new start. I have thanked God more than once that that was just what he did not do.

Instead, he took me out, bought me three more drinks, put me to bed and yanked me bodily out of town the next noon to a city 200 miles away and into the arms of one of the most extraordinary bunch of men in the United States. Here, while in the hospital, men with clear eyes and happy faces came to see me and told me the story of their lives. Some of them were hard to believe, but it didn't take a lot of brain work to see they had something I could use. And it was so simple. The sum and substance of it seemed to be that if I would turn to God it was very probable that He could do a better job with my life than I had.

When I got out of the hospital, I was invited to stay in the home of one of the fellows. Here I found myself suddenly and uncontrollably seized with the old panic. I was in a strange house, in a strange city, and fear gripped me. I shut myself in my room. I couldn't sit down, I couldn't stand up, I couldn't lie down, couldn't leave because I had nowhere to go and no money to take me. Any attempt at reasoning accomplished nothing.

THE FEARFUL ONE 335

Suddenly in this maelstrom I grasped at a straw. Maybe God would help me—just maybe, mind you. I was willing to give Him a chance, but with considerable doubt. I got down on my knees—something I hadn't done in thirty years. I asked Him if He would let me hand over all these fears and this panic to Him. I lay down on the bed and went to sleep like a baby. An hour later I awoke to a new world. I could scarcely credit my senses, but that terrible phobia which had wrecked my life for eighteen years, was gone. Utterly gone. And in its place was a power and fearlessness which is a bit hard to get accustomed to.

All that happened nearly six months ago. In those six months a new life has opened before me. It isn't that I have been cured of an ordinarily incurable disease. I have found a joy in living that has nothing to do with money or material success. I know that incomparable happiness that comes from helping some other fellow get straightened out. Don't get me wrong. We are not a bunch of angels. None of us has any notion of becoming such. But we know that we can never go completely back to old ways because we are traveling upward through service to others and in trying to be honest, decent, and loving

toward the world, instead of sliding and slipping around in a life of drinking, cheating, lying and doing what we like.

TRUTH FREED ME!

In May 1936, after a prolonged period of alcoholism, my friends, my associates, my superiors, and those people who really loved me in spite of embarrassments too numerous to mention, finally left me because they had come to the conclusion that I didn't have any idea of doing or trying to do the right thing.

I was a spineless individual who didn't care a rap for anyone or anything—I was hopeless and knew it—and then in my extremity, The Divine Comforter, "Truth" came to me in a barroom where I had spent the major portion of six weeks.

The Divine Comforter, in my experience, came in the guise of a former drinking companion whom I had assisted home on several occasions. Because of physical infirmities brought about by alcoholic excess, he had been unable to walk a distance of three blocks to his home unassisted, when I last saw him. Now he approached me, and to my amazement he was sober and appeared greatly improved in physical condition.

He induced me to take a ride with him, and as we rode along told me of the marvelous thing that had come into his life. He had more than a practical idea of my difficulties, he also had a logical and practical idea as to how they might be overcome.

He started the conversation by explaining acute alcoholism and stated very bluntly that I was an alcoholic.

TRUTH FREED ME! 337

This was news to me in spite of the fact that I had promised everybody East of the Mississippi, if they'd take time to listen, that I was through with drink. At the time I made these promises, I honestly wanted to quit drinking, but for some unknown reason hadn't seemed able to. He told me why I failed.

He then suggested that I accompany him to a local doctor who had been helpful to him. It took forty-eight hours of persuasion and quite a few drinks to fortify myself, but I finally agreed to go. The doctor turned out to be one who had been an alcoholic himself, and in gratitude for the release he had found and because he understood the true meaning of the phrase "Brotherly Love" was spending a great portion of his time helping unfortunate individuals like myself.

With the help and advice of these two individuals and two or three associates, I was able, for the first time in two and a half years, to stay sober for six weeks, and then disastrously tried the beer experiment. For some time I couldn't get hold of myself, but gradually came out of hiding and exposed myself again to this influence which had been so helpful.

July 2, 1936, I again contacted the two individuals, and since that day I have never had a drink. However, because of the difficulties I encountered as the result of the beer experiment, I was unable for some time to find reality in this new way of life. I was doubtful, fearful, full of selfpity, afraid to humiliate myself.

This unreality lasted until December 11th, when I was faced with the absolute necessity of raising a sum of money. For the first time came the realization that

338 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

I was faced with a difficulty from which I seemed unable to extricate myself. Of course, I took time out to bemoan the fact that "after all I'd done, this had to happen to me" but on the advice of my wife, I reluctantly went to a banker.

I told him my story completely. I went to him believing that my need was money. I went there as a last resort to attempt to pry it loose to meet my needs. My need was not money, but again I had been led to the proper source. After having related my story to the banker, who knew my reputation not only as an alcoholic but as an individual who didn't pay his bills, he said, "I know something of what you are trying to do, and I believe you are on the right track. Are you right with the Father who knows your needs before you ask? If so, you are not dependent upon this bank or any individual in it, or any rules by which we operate, because your help comes from an ever present and all powerful Father. I am going to do everything I can to secure this loan for you. However, I don't want anything that happens here to throw you off the track, I want you to leave here feeling that you have done everything you could to secure these funds, and go about your business. Your business is business with God's work. I don't know whether that calls for you to go and collect a bill, sell some new contract, or to sit quietly and pray, but your Father knows and if you will but permit Him, He will direct you."

I had again found reality. My needs were met from another entirely unexpected source.

TRUTH FREED ME! 339

The manifestations of this ever present Power in my experience since 1936 are too numerous to mention. Let it suffice to say that I am profoundly grateful for the opportunities I have had of seeing and knowing "TRUTH."

340

SMILE WITH ME, AT ME

AT THE age of eighteen I finished high school and during my last year there my studies were dropping away to be replaced by dancing, going out nights, and thinking of a good time as most of the boys of my age did. I secured a job with a well known telegraph company which lasted about a year, due to the fact I thought I was too clever for a \$7.00 a week job which did not supply me with enough money for my pleasures, such as taking girls out, etc. I was not at all satisfied with my small wages.

Now, I was a very good violinist at the time and was offered jobs with some well known orchestras, but my parents objected to my being a professional musician although my last year in high school was mostly spent playing for dances and giving exhibition dances at most of the fraternity affairs. Now naturally I was far from satisfied with my seven dollars a week wages, so when I came across a boy neighbor of mine on the subway one night (by the way I read in the newspaper that this same boy died four days ago) he told me he was a host in a celebrated Restaurant and Cabaret, and that his salary ran \$14.00 per week and he made \$50.00 a week in tips. Well, think of being paid for

dancing with the carefree ladies of the afternoon and receiving all that sum, and me working for only \$7.00 per. The follow

SMILE WITH ME, AT ME 341

ing day I went straight uptown to Broadway and never did go back to my old job.

This was the beginning of a long stretch of high-flying as I thought, only to find out when I was forty-one years old to be very low-flying. I worked in this restaurant until I was twenty-one, then we went into the world war. I joined the navy. My enlistment pleased the owner of my cabaret so much that he offered me a good job at the end of my federal service.

The day I walked in to his establishment with my release from active duty, he said, "You are my assistant manager from now on." Well, this pleased me as you can imagine and my hat from then on would not fit.

Now, all this time my taste for liquor was constantly growing although it was no habit and I had no craving. In other words, if I had a date and wanted a drink with the girl friend I would, otherwise I would not think of it at all.

In six months time I found I was too good for this job and a competitive restaurateur, or a chain of the best well-known night clubs offered me a better position which I accepted. This night life was starting to tell and show its marks and together with the slump in that sort of business at the time, I decided to apply for a job with a well known ballet master who drilled many choruses for Broadway shows.

I was this man's assistant and I really had to work very hard for the little money I received, sometimes twelve hours or more a day, but I got the experience and honor which was just what I was looking for. This was one time when my work interfered with my drinking. This

342 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

job came to an end one evening when I was drinking quite heavily. A certain prominent actress inquired of Professor X, my boss, if I would be interested to sign an eighty week contract for a vaudeville tour. It seems she could use me as a partner in her act. Now, a very nice woman, Miss J. who was office clerk and pianist for the boss, overheard the conversation and told both Mr. X and Miss Z that I would not be interested.

On hearing this I went out and drank enough to cause plenty of trouble, slapping Miss J. and doing an all round drunk act in the studio.

This was the end of my high-flying among the white lights. I was only twenty-four years old and I came home to settle down; in fact I had to. I was broke both financially and in spirit.

Being a radio operator in the navy, I became interested in amateur radio. I got a federal license and made a transmitting radio set and would often sit up half the night trying to reach out all over the country. Broadcasting radio was just in its infancy then, so I began to make small receiving sets for my friends and neighbors. Finally I worked up quite a business and opened a store, then two stores, with eleven people working for me.

Now here is where Old Barleycorn showed his hidden strength.

I found that in order to have a paying business I had to make friends, not the kind I was used to, but ordinary, sane, hard working people. In order to do this I should not drink, but I found that I could not stop.

I will never forget the first time I realized this. Every Saturday, my wife and I would go to some tavern. I

SMILE WITH ME, AT ME 343

would take a bottle of wine, gin, or the like, and we would spend an evening dancing, drinking, etc. (This was fourteen years ago.)

I was practically a pioneer in the radio business and that must account for people putting up with me as they did. However, within three years time I had lost both stores, I won't say entirely due to my drinking, but at least if I had been physically and mentally fit, I could have survived and kept a small business going.

Now from this time up to about a year ago, I drifted from one job to another. I peddled brushes, did odd jobs such as painting, and finally got established with a well known piano company as assistant service manager.

Then came the big crash of 1929 and this particular company abolished their radio department. For two years I worked for one of my old competitors who owned a radio store. He put up with my drinking until I was in such a physical breakdown that I had to quit.

All this time my troubles at home were getting worse. My whole family blamed my failure on the alcoholic question and so the usual arguments would start the instant I came in the house. This naturally made me go out and drink some more. If I had no money, I would borrow, beg, or even steal enough for a bottle.

My wife fortunately went to business which was our only salvation. Our little boy was six years old at the time and due to the fact we needed someone to care for him during the day we moved in with my family. Now the trouble did start, because I not only had my wife to face every evening, but three of the elders of the family.

My wife did everything for me she possibly could.

344 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

First she got in touch with a well known psychiatrist and I went faithfully to him for a few months. This particular doctor was such a nervous individual, I thought he had the St. Vitus' dance and I really thought he needed some kind of treatment more than I did. He advised hospitalization from three months to a year.

Well, this was all out of order as far as I was concerned. In the first place I had an idea that my wife wanted to put me away in a state institution where maybe I would be stuck for the rest of my life. In the second place, I wanted to go, if anywhere, to a private institution and that was far beyond our financial means. In the third place, I knew that that would be no cure, because I reasoned that it would be like taking candy out of a young child's reach. The instant I would come out a free man I would go right back to old Alky again. In this one thing I found out later I was perfectly right.

What I thought and wanted at the time was "not to want, to want to take a drink." This phrase is a very important link in my story. I knew this could only be done by myself, but how could I accomplish it? Well, this was the main question.

The point was always that when I did drink, I wanted all the time not to, and that alone wasn't enough. At the time I felt like a drink, I did not want to take

it at all, but I had to, it seemed. So if you can grasp what I mean, I wished I would not want that drink. Am I nuts, or do you get me?

To get back to the doctor. If anything, these visits made me worse, and worst of all, everyone told me I wanted to drink and that was all there was to that. After

SMILE WITH ME, AT ME 345

going to as many as six or eight other doctors, some of my own friends advised my wife to make her plans for the future as I was a hopeless case, had no backbone, no will power, and would end up in the gutter.

Well, here I was, a man with much ability, a violinist, a radio engineer, a ballet master, and at this point took up hair dressing, so that added one more to the list. Can you beat it? I knew there must be some way out of all this mess. Everyone told me to stop my drinking, but none could tell me how, until I met a friend and believe me he turned out to be a true friend, something I never had until this past year.

One morning, after one of my escapades, my wife informed me I was to go with her to a public hospital or she would pack up and leave with our boy. My father, being a physician for forty years, put me in a private New York hospital. I was there ten days and was put in physical shape, and above everything else put on the right path to recovery and happiness.

My friend first asked me if I really wanted to stop drinking, and if I did, would I do anything no matter what it was in order to? I knew there was only one thing left to do if I wished to live and not enter an insane asylum where I knew I would eventually wind up.

Making up my mind that I would, he said, "Fine." And went on to explain the simple steps to take. After spending an hour or two with me that day he returned two days later and went into the subject more thoroughly. He explained he had been in the same hospital with the same malady and after taking these steps

346 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

after his discharge, had not taken a drink in three years and also there were about sixty others that had this same experience. All these fellows got together on Sunday evenings and brought their wives and everybody spent a very pleasant time together.

Well, after I met all these people, I was more than surprised to find a very interesting, sociable, and friendly crowd. They seemed to take more interest in me than all of my old fraternity brothers or Broadway pals had ever done.

There were no dues or expenses whatsoever. I went along for about fourteen weeks, partly keeping these ideas, and so one afternoon I thought it would do no harm to take a couple of drinks and no more. Saying to myself, "I have this thing in hand now, I can be a moderate drinker." Here I made a fatal mistake. After all my past experience, again I thought I could handle the situation only to find out one week later it was the same old thing. I repeated the same thing over again and another week again.

Finally I was back at the hospital, although I went under protest. My wife had expected to take two weeks vacation in the country with me, but instead had to use this money for the hospital expenses. During my one week stay, I held this as a grudge against her. The result was I got drunk three days after I was discharged from the hospital. And she left me for two weeks. During this

period of time I drank heavily, being upset not only over her absence, but perfectly at sea as to how I could ever get back on my feet and make a new start again.

SMILE WITH ME, AT ME 347

There was no mistake about it there was something that I failed to do in those simple steps. So I carefully went over each day as best I could since my first drink after the fourteen weeks of sobriety, and found I had slipped away from quite a few of some of the most important things which I should do in order to keep sober.

Certainly I was down now—ashamed to face my new friends—my own family giving me up as lost and everyone saying, "The system didn't work, did it?"

This last remark was more than too much for me. Why should this fellowship of hard working fellows be jeopardized by me? It worked for them. As a matter of fact, not one who has kept faithfully to it has ever slipped.

One morning, after a sleepless night worrying over what I could do to straighten myself out, I went to my room alone—took my Bible in hand and asked Him, the One Power, that I might open to a good place to read—and I read. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?"

That was enough for me—I started to understand. Here were the words of Paul a great teacher. When then if I had slipped? Now, I could understand.

From that day I gave and still give and always will, time everyday to read the word of God and let Him do all the caring. Who am I to try to run myself or anyone else?

348

A CLOSE SHAVE

The year 1890 witnessed my advent as the youngest of five sons to a fine Christian mother and a hard working blacksmith father. At the age of eight my father used to send me after his pail of beer and it was by lapping the foam off the beer that I first discovered that the taste was much to my liking. By the time I was fourteen, at which time I quit school, I had found that wine and hard cider were also pleasing to my palate. The next six years I spent learning the art of barbering and by the end of this period I had become both a proficient barber and an earnest drinker.

During the next 10 or 12 years I was able to acquire several lucrative shops, some with poolrooms and restaurants attached. It seemed quite impossible however for me to stand prosperity so I would drink myself out of one situation, get myself together a bit, develop another, and then repeat the performance.

The time came when I could no longer refinance myself so I began to float about the country, getting a job here and there as I could, but invariably I got fired in a short time because of my unreliability.

My marriage, which occurred in 1910 about the time I started my successful ownership of shops, resulted in our having a family of ten children who were usually desperately in need because I used my slender income for booze instead of providing for them.

I finally secured a job in a shop in a town of about 4,500 people, where I now live. My reputation for drinking soon became more or less generally known. About this time a deacon and the pastor of one of the local churches used to come in the shop for their work and were constantly inviting me to church and Bible classes, which invitations irritated me very much. I earnestly wished they would mind their own business.

I finally did accept one or two invitations to social functions at the home of one of these men, and was received so cordially that the barrier between us was partially lowered.

I did not stop drinking however, though my feeling toward these men was kindly. They at last persuaded me to go to a nearby town to have a talk with a doctor who had had a great deal of experience with this type of trouble. I listened to the man for two hours, and although my mind was quite foggy, I retained a good deal of what he said. I feel that the combined effort of these three Christian gentlemen made it possible for me to have a vital spiritual experience. This occurred in March, 1937.

For about six years previous to this time I was never at any time completely free from the influence of liquor.

Since that time I have regained the love of my family and the respect of the community, and can truthfully say that the past two years have been the happiest of my life.

I have busied myself a great deal during these two years in helping others who were afflicted as I was, and

350 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

the combined efforts of the deacon, the pastor, and myself, have resulted in nine other men finding a way out of difficulties which were identical with mine. I feel this activity has played an important part in my mastery of this most devastating habit.

EDUCATED AGNOSTIC

WHY go into the drinking pattern that is so much the same with all of us? Three times I had left the hospital with hope that I was saying goodbye forever. And here I was again.

The first day there I told the kindly doctor that I was a thoroughly hopeless case and would probably continue to return as long as I could beg, borrow, or steal the money to get in. On the second day he told me that he knew of something that would keep me off liquor for life. I laughed at him. Yes, indeed, I would do anything or take anything that would produce such results, but there wasn't anything. On the third day a man came to talk with me. He was an alcoholic who had stopped! He talked about alcoholism and a spiritual way of life. I was deeply impressed by his seriousness, but nothing that he said made sense to me. He spoke about God, and a power greater than one's self. I remember being very careful not to say anything that might shake his faith in whatever it was he believed! I was deeply grateful to him for taking the trouble to talk with me, but what he had was not for me. I had thought much about religion and had come to rather definite conclusions. There was no God. The

universe was an inexplicable phenomenon. In spite of my sorry state and outlook, there were many beautiful things in life, but no beauty. There were truths discoverable about life, but no truth.

352 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

There were people who were good, kind, considerate, but no such thing as goodness. I had read rather extensively, but when people began to talk in such ultimates I was lost. I could find in life no eternal purpose nor anything that might be labeled "divine guidance." War, illness, cruelty, stupidity, poverty and greed were not and could not be the product of any purposeful creation. The whole thing simply didn't make sense.

About this I felt no deep emotion. I had struggled with the problem during late adolescence, but had long since ceased to give it anxious thought. Many people believe in a god of some sort and worship him in various ways. That was excellent. I thought it nice that so many people, poor misguided souls, could find so simple a solution to their problems. If this world proved too hopelessly disillusioning they could always seek comfort in a more pleasant existence promised in a world to come, where wrongs would be righted and justice tempered with tender mercy would prevail. But none of that was for me. I had enough courage and intellectual honesty to face life as I saw it without recourse to a self-erected deity.

The next day another man visited me. He, too, had been an alcoholic and stopped drinking. He pointed out that I had found myself unable to handle my liquor problem by myself. He had been in the same position, yet he hadn't had a drink in over three years! He told me of other men who had found sobriety through the recognition of some power beyond themselves. If I cared to I was to consider myself invited to a gathering

EDUCATED AGNOSTIC 353

the following Tuesday where I would meet other alcoholics who had stopped.

With the knowledge I now have, it is hard for me to recall how screwy the whole thing sounded—the blind leading the blind, a union of drunks, all banded together in some kind of a spiritual belief! What could be more idiotic! But . . . these men were sober! Nuts!

I returned to my despairing wife with this incoherent story of a bunch of drunks who had found a cure for their alcoholism through some kind of spiritual exercise and who held regular meetings where, as far as I could figure out, they went through some kind of spiritual exercise! She was very nearly convinced that my mental balance had now been completely and probably permanently destroyed. The only rational support I could find for giving it a try was that it was vouched for by the kindly doctor whom she had met on several occasions at the hospital. That and the fact that nothing else worked.

May I stop at this point and address a few sentences direct to agnostic or atheistically inclined alcoholics: You can't take less stock in the references made to God in this book than I would have if this book had been available to me at that time. To you those references have no meaning. They have simply used a name that people give to a fond delusion. All your life, except possibly in early childhood, when you conceived of an enormous figure with a flowing white beard somewhere beyond the clouds, it has meant nothing. You have now too much intelligence and honesty to allow of such delusions. Even if you could, you are too proud to affirm

a belief now that you are in desperate trouble, that you denied when things were rosy. Or, you might possibly persuade yourself to believe in some creative force, or algebraic "X," but what earthly good would an "X" be in solving such a problem as you face? And, even admitting from your knowledge of psychology, it is possible you might acquire such delusions, how could you possibly believe in them if you recognized them as delusions? Some such thinking must have been going on in your mind as you have weighed these incredible experiences against your own inability to cope with a problem that is gradually destroying your personality. Rest assured that such questions were in my mind. I could see no satisfactory solution to any of them. But I kept hard to the only thing that seemed to hold out any hope, and gradually my difficulties were lessened. I have not given up my intellect for the sake of my soul, nor have I destroyed my integrity to preserve my health and sanity. All I had feared to lose I have gained and all I feared to gain I have lost.

But to conclude my story: The following Tuesday, hardly daring to hope and fearful of the worst, my wife and I attended our first gathering with former alcoholic slaves who had been made free through the rediscovery of a power for good, found through a spiritual attitude toward life. I know that I have never before been so inspired. It was not anything that happened. Because nothing happened. Nor yet by anything that was said, but more by an atmosphere created by friendliness, sincerity, honesty, confidence, and good cheer. I couldn't

EDUCATED AGNOSTIC 355

believe that these men could have been drunks, and yet gradually I learned their stories, alcoholics every one!

That was, with me, the beginning of a new life. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for me to put into words the change that has taken place in me, I have since learned that with many members the change has been almost instantaneous. This was not the case with me. I was tremendously inspired at first, but my basic thinking was not altered that evening nor did I expect any profound change. I felt that while the spiritual aspect of what these men had was not for me, I did believe strongly in the emphasis they put on the need to help others. I felt that if I could have the inspiration of these gatherings and if I could have an opportunity to try to help others that the two together would reinforce my own will-power and thus be of tremendous assistance. But gradually, in a manner I can not explain, I began to reexamine the beliefs I had thought beyond criticism. Almost imperceptibly my whole attitude toward life underwent a silent revolution. I lost many worries and gained confidence. I found myself saying and thinking things that a short time ago I would have condemned as platitudes! A belief in the basic spirituality of life has grown and with it belief in a supreme and guiding power for good.

In the process of this change I can recognize two immensely significant steps for me. The first step I took when I admitted to myself for the first time that all my previous thinking might be wrong. The second step came when I first consciously wished to believe. As a

result of this experience I am convinced that to seek is to find, to ask is to be given. The day never passes that I do not silently cry out in thankfulness, not

merily for my release from alcohol but even more for a change that has given life new meaning, dignity, and beauty.

ANOTHER PRODIGAL STORY

"HELLO, Pal.

"Hello, Buddy!"

"Have a drink?"

"Got one!"

"Come over on the next stool I'm lonesome. Hell of a world."

"You said it, brother,—hell of a world."

"You taking rye? Mine's gin. God, I'm up against it now!"

"How's 'at?"

"Oh, same old hell—hell—hell. She's going to leave me now!"

"Your wife?"

"Yeah. How am I going to live? Can't go home like this; too damn drunk to stay out. Can't land in jail—will if I stay out—ruin my business—business going anyway—break her heart. Where is she you ask? She's at the store, working I guess, probably eating her heart out waiting for me. What time is it? Seven o'clock? Store's been closed an hour. She's gone home by now. Well, what the hell. Have one more—then I'll go."

That is a hazy recollection of my last debauch. Nearly a year ago now. By the time my new "bar fly friend" and I had soaked up several more, I was shedding tears and he, in the tender throes of drunken sympathy, was working out a guaranteed plan whereby my

358 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

wife would greet me with great joy and outspread arms as soon as "we" got home.

Yes "we" were going to my home. He was the finest fixer in the world. He knew all about how to handle wives. He admitted that!

So, two drunks, now lifetime buddies, stumbled out arm in arm headed up the hill towards home.

A draft of cool air cleared some of the fog away from my befuddled brain. "Wait a minute, what's this so-and-so plan of yours? I got to know about it," I said. "I got to know what you're going to say and what I say."

The plan was a honey! All he had to do was to lead me up to the apartment, ring the bell, ask my wife if I was her husband, and then tell her he had found me down at the river about to jump from the bridge and had saved my life.

"That's all there is to it," he kept mumbling over and over, "works every time—never fails."

On up the hill we staggered, then my "life saver" got a better idea that would clinch the deal. He'd have to go home first and put on clean linen. Couldn't let the nice lady see a dirty shirt.

That sounded all right. Maybe he'd have a bottle at his home. So we stumbled up to his place, a dreary third floor back room, on a third rate street.

I have a hazy recollection of that place, but have never been able to find it since. There was a photograph of a quite pretty girl on his dresser. He told me it was a picture of his wife and that she had kicked him out because he was drunk. "You know how women are," he said.

Some fixer!

He did put on a clean shirt all right and then reached into a drawer and pulled out a .38 calibre revolver. That gave me quite a sobering shock. I reached for the gun realizing in a hazy way that here was trouble.

He began to pull the trigger and every moment I expected to hear an explosion, but the gun was empty. He proved it!

Then he got a new idea. To reconcile my wife and make her happy, he would tell her the gun was mine, that I stood on the bridge, with the gun at my head and that he snatched it away just in time to save my life.

God Almighty must have, at that moment, granted me a flash of sanity. I quickly excused myself while he was completing his toilet and, on the pretext of phoning my wife, rushed noisily down the stairs and ran down the street with all my might.

Some blocks away I came to a drug store, bought a pint of gin, and drank half it in several large gulps, staggered on up to my apartment, and tumbled into bed, fully dressed and dead drunk.

This wasn't any new terror for my wife. This sort of thing had been going on for several years, only I was getting worse and worse with each drunken spree and more difficult to handle.

Only the previous day I had been in an accident. A Good Samaritan saw my condition and got me away quickly, before the police came, and drove me back to my home.

I was dreadfully drunk that day and my wife consulted a lawyer as preliminary to entering divorce ac-

360 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

tion. I swore to her that I wouldn't drink again and within 24 hours, here I was in bed dead drunk.

Several months previously I had spent a week in a New York hospital for alcoholics and came out feeling that everything would be all right. Then I began to think that I had the thing licked. I could practice a little controlled drinking. I knew I couldn't take much but just one drink before dinner. That went all right, too. Sure I had it licked now! The next step was to take one quick one at noon and cover it up with a milk shake. To make it doubly sure, I'd have ice cream put into the milk shake, and then, so help me, I don't know what the next step down was, but I surely landed at the bottom with an awful, heartbreaking thud.

The next morning was June 7th. I recall the date so well because the sixth is my daughter's birthday. And that, by the grace of God, was my last spree.

That morning I was afraid to open my eyes, surely my wife would have kept her promise and left me. I loved my wife. It is a paradox I know, but I did and do.

When I did stir, there she was sitting at my bedside,

"Come on," she said, "get up, bathe, shave and dress. We're going to New York this morning."

"New York!" I said, "To the hospital?"

"Yes."

"I haven't any money to pay a hospital."

"I know you haven'," she said, "but I arranged it all last night over long distance and I'm going to give you that one chance, once again. If you let me down this time, that's all there is."

Well, I went into that hospital again feeling like a

whipped cur. My wife pleaded with the doctor to please do something to save her husband, to save her home, to save our business, and our self-respect.

The doctor assured us that he really had something for me this time that would work and with that faint hope, we separated; she to hurry back home, 150 miles away, and carry on the work of two people and I to sit trembling and fearful there in what seemed to me, a shameful place.

Four days later a man called on me and seemed interested to know how I was coming along. He told me that he, too, had been there several times but had now found relief.

That night another man came. He, too, had suffered the same trouble and told how he and the other fellow and several more had been released from alcohol.

Then the next day a fine fellow came, and in a halting but effective way, told how he had placed himself in God's hand and keeping. Almost before I knew it, I was asking God to clean me up.

I suppose there are many who feel a strong resentment against such a spiritual approach. Some of Alcoholics Anonymous whom I have met since that day tell me they had difficulty in accepting a simple, day to day, plan of faith. In my case I was ripe for such an opportunity, perhaps because of early religious training. I have always, it seems, had a keen sense of the fact and presence of God.

That, too, like loving my wife and at the same time hurting her so dreadfully, is paradoxical, but it's a fact.

362 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

I knew that God, was there with infinite love and yet, somehow, I kept on drifting further and further away. But now I do feel that my heart and mind are "tuned in" and by His grace there will be no more alcoholic "static."

After making this final agreement (not just another resolution) to let God to be first in my life, the whole outlook and horizon brightened up in a manner which I am unable to describe except to say that it was "glorious."

The following day was Monday and my ex-alcoholic friend insisted that I check out from the hospital and come over to his home in 'Jersey. I did that and there I found a lovely wife and children all so "happy about the whole thing."

The next night I was taken to a meeting, at the home of an ex-alcoholic in Brooklyn, where to my surprise, there were more than 30 men like myself, telling of a liberty of living unmatched by anything I had ever seen.

Since returning to my home, life has been so different. I have paid off the old debts, have money enough now for decent clothes and some to use in helping others, a thing which I enjoy doing but didn't do when I had to contribute so generously to alcohol.

I am trying to help other alcoholics. At this writing there are four of us working, all of whom have been kicked around dreadfully.

There is no "cocky" feeling about this for me. I know I am an alcoholic and while I used to call on God to help me, my conclusion is that I was simply asking

ANOTHER PRODIGAL STORY 363

God to help me drink alcohol without its hurting me which is a far different thing than asking him to help me not to drink at all.

So here I stand, living day to day, in His presence, and it is wonderful—This prodigal came home.

THE CAR SMASHER

DURING the first week of March, 1937, through the grace of God, I ended 20 years of a life made practically useless because I could not do two things.

First, I was unable to not take a drink.

Second, I was unable to take a drink without getting drunk. Perhaps a third as important as the other two should be added; my being unwilling to admit either of the first two. With the result I kept trying to drink without getting drunk, and kept making a nightmare of my life, causing suffering and hardship to all those relatives and friends who tried so hard to help me and whom, when I was sober, I took the greatest pleasure in pleasing.

The first time I drank anything strong, or in greater quantity than a glass of beer, I got disgustingly drunk and missed the dinner which had been arranged for me in honor of my coming marriage.

I had to be taken home and remained in bed the following day; more sick than I thought a human could be and live. Yet, until two years ago I periodically did the same thing.

Making money was always pretty easy when I was sober and worked.

All right when sober—absolutely helpless with a drink aboard. But I seemed to have had the idea that making

THE CAR SMASHER 365

money or a living was something to take or let alone. I got into the real estate business—began to neglect business, sometimes with four houses under construction, wouldn't see any of them for a week or even longer—sometimes paid good money for an option, then forgot to exercise it. I made and lost plenty of money in the market. Understand, I wasn't actually drunk all of this time but there seemed always to be an excuse to have a drink, and this first one, more and more often lead to my becoming drunk. As time went on, periods between drunks got shorter and I was full of fear; fear that I wouldn't be able to do anything I agreed to do; fear of meeting men; worrying about what they might know of my drinking and its results; all of which made me quite useless whether I was sober or drunk.

Thus I drifted. Breaking promises to my wife, my mother, and a host of other relatives and friends who stood more from me and tried harder than humans should be expected to, to help me.

I always seemed to pick the most inopportune time for a binge. An important business deal to be closed might find me in another city. Once when entrusted to purchase for a large customer, I agreed to meet his representative in New York. I spent the time waiting for a train in a bar; arrived in New York tight; stayed tight the week; and came home by a route twice the distance from New York.

Worked weeks, by long distance, wire, letters, and personal calls, to contact possible business connections under proper conditions and finally succeeded, only to

show up tight or get tight and insult the man who's friendship, or respect meant so much.

Each time there was the feeling of regret, inability to understand why, but a firm determination that it would never happen again—but it did—in fact the periods between became increasingly shorter, and the duration of each binge longer.

During the aforementioned period, I had spent thousands of dollars, my home was broken up; half a dozen cars smashed up; I had been picked up by police for driving while intoxicated—plain drunk; had sponged and borrowed money; cashed rubber checks; and made such a general nuisance of myself that I lost all the friends I had. At least they felt unwilling to be a party to financing me while I made a more complete ass of myself. And I, on my side was ashamed to face any of them when I was sober.

My friends secured jobs for me; I made good on them for a time. I advanced quickly to night superintendent in a factory but it wasn't long until I was missing, or worse, turning up drunk; was warned—warned again; finally fired. I was later rehired as a factory hand and mighty glad to have it—advance again—then back to the bottom—always the same process.

I drank continuously and when I drank, sooner or later, and generally sooner, I got drunk and threw everything away.

During the early part of 1935 my brother secured my release from the city jail. On that day by sincere but non-alcoholic friends I was shown what might be done about my drinking with the help of God.

THE CAR SMASHER 367

I asked for this help, gratefully accepted it, and in addition to losing my desire for drink, asked for and received the same help in other matters. I began to earn my living and in my new found security, was unashamed to meet people I had avoided for years with happy results.

Things continued well, I had two or three advancements to better jobs with greater earning power. My every need was being met as long as I accepted and acknowledged the Divine Help which was so generously given.

I find now, as I look back, that this period covered about six or eight months, then I began to think how smart I was; to wonder if my superiors realized what they had in me; if they were not pretty small about the money they paid me; as these thoughts grew, my feeling of gratefulness grew less. I was neglecting to ask for help—when I received it as I always did, I neglected to acknowledge it. Instead I took great credit for myself. I began to take credit for the nondrinking too—it came to me strongly that I had conquered the drinking habit myself—I became convinced of my great will power.

Then someone suggested a glass of beer—I had one. This was even better than I thought—I could take a drink and not get drunk. So another day, another beer until it was regular every day. Now I was indeed in the saddle concerning drink—could take it or leave it alone. Just to prove it to myself, I decided to march right past the place I usually stopped for beer, and I felt pretty good as I went to the parking lot for my car. The longer I drove the greater was my pride that I had

finally licked liquor. I was sure I had—so sure in fact that I stopped and had a beer before I went home. In my smugness I continued to drink beer and began occasionally to drink liquor.

So it went until inevitably, "as darkness follows the sun," I got drunk and was right back where I had been fifteen years before, slipping into a binge every now and then—never knowing when they would come—nor where I would wind up.

This lasted about eight months—I didn't miss much time from work—did spend one ten day stretch in the hospital after a beating I got while drunk—was warned a few times by my superiors—but was "getting by."

In the meantime I had heard of some men who, like myself, were what I had always scoffed at being—alcoholics. I had been invited to see them, but after twenty years of drinking, I felt there was nothing wrong with me. They might need it; they might be queer; but not me. I wasn't going to get drunk again.

Of course I did, again and again, until these men not only contacted me but took me under their wing.

After a few days of "degoofing" in a hospital, these men came to me one by one and told me of their experiences. They didn't lecture—didn't tell me I should quit. But they did tell me how to quit. THAT WAS IMPORTANT and simple too.

Their suggestion was that we simply acknowledge we had made a pretty dismal failure of our lives, that we accept as truth and act upon what we had always been taught and known, that there was a kind and merciful

THE CAR SMASHER 369

God; that we were His children; and, that if we would let Him, He would help us.

I had certainly made a mess of my life. From the age of 20 I had thrown aside everything God had seen fit to endow me with. Why not avail myself of this all wise, ever-present help?

This I did. I ask for, accept, and acknowledge this help, and know that so long as I do, I shall never take a drink and what is more important, though impossible without the first, all other phases of my life have been helped.

There are, it seems to me, four steps to be taken by one who is a victim of alcoholism.

First: Have a real desire to quit.

Second: Admit you can't. (This is hardest.)

Third: Ask for His ever present help.

Fourth: Accept and acknowledge this help.

HINDSIGHT

FIRE! Still, I got a new and better job. One which gave me more time to relax and where drinking was permitted during working hours. People were beginning to criticize my drinking habits and I scoffed at them. Hadn't I earned ten thousand dollars that year? And wasn't this the middle of the depression? Who were they to say that I couldn't handle my liquor? A year of this and I was fired.

Other jobs followed with the same net result. After each experience of this kind I would sit down and figure out the reason why it happened. I always found a good reason, and usually people accepted it and gave me another chance. For weeks, sometimes months, I wouldn't touch a drop and because I could do this, I reasoned that there was a real excuse for that last bender, and since that excuse no longer existed I could start to drink moderately again.

I usually did—for a while. Then I would step up the consumption about one glass per day until I reached the stage where all of the past unhappy experiences associated with drinking were brought back to my mind. Soon I was crying in my beer, full of self-pity, and off again to a flying start toward a floundering finish.

How many times this happened, I don't know. I don't even want to know. I do know that during this period I completely smashed nine new automobiles and

HINDSIGHT 371

was never scratched. Even this didn't convince me that there might be a God who was looking out for me in answer to the prayers of others. I made many friends and abused them terribly. I didn't want to, but when it was a question of a friendship or a drink, I usually took the drink.

In a final effort to escape, I went to New York thinking I could leave my reputation and troubles behind me. It didn't work. I was hired by eight nationally known organizations and fired just as quickly when they had checked my references. The world was against me. They wouldn't give me a chance. So I continued my drinking and took any mediocre job I could get.

Occasionally I dropped into a church half hoping that I might absorb something, anything, that might help a little bit. On one of these visits I saw and met a girl who I felt could be the answer to all of my problems. I told her all about myself and how I felt sure that with her friendship and love everything could and would be different. Although born in New York she was "from Missouri." I would have to show her first. She had seen other girls try to reform men by marrying them and she knew it didn't work.

She suggested praying and having faith and a lot of things that seemed silly at the time, but I really got down to business and started doing some serious bargaining with God. I prayed and prayed. In all earnestness I said, "If You will get this girl for me then I'll stop drinking for You." And "If You will only get me my original job back, I'll drink moderately for You."

372 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

I soon found out that God didn't work that way because I didn't get the girl or the job.

Six months later I was sitting in a small hotel on the west side of New York full of remorse and desperate because I didn't know what would happen next. A middle-aged man approached me and said in a very sincere voice, "Do you really want to stop drinking?" Immediately I answered "Yes," because I knew that was the correct answer. He wrote down a name and address and said "When you are sure you do, go and see this man." He walked away.

I began to think, "Did I really want to quit? Why should I? If I couldn't have this girl and I couldn't ever have a good job again, why in the hell should I quit?" I tucked the address into my pocket along with a nickel for subway fare,

just in case I ever decided to really quit. I started drinking again, but could get no happiness or release regardless of the number of drinks.

Occasionally I would check up to see if the address and the nickel were still safe, because I was being tortured with one thought this girl had given to me. "You must be decent for your own sake. And because you want to be decent, not because some one else wants you to be."

A week later I found myself in the presence of the man whose address was in my pocket. His story was incredible. I couldn't believe it, but he had the proof. I met men whose stories convinced me that in the ranks of men who had been heavy drinkers I was an amateur and a sissy.

What I heard was hard to believe but I wanted to

HINDSIGHT 373

believe it. What's more I wanted to try it and see if it wouldn't work for me.

It worked, and is still working. For weeks I was bitter against society. Why didn't some one put me wise to this before? Why did I have to go on like that for years making my parents unhappy, abusing friends, and passing up opportunities? It wasn't fair that I should be the instrument to make people unhappy.

I believe now that I was given this experience so that I might understand and be of use in helping others to find a solution to this and other problems.

When I decided to do something about my problem, I was reconciled to the fact that it might be necessary for me to wash dishes, scrub floors, or do some menial task for possibly many years in order to re-establish myself as a sober, sane, and reliable person. Although I still wanted and hoped for the better things in life, I was prepared to accept whatever was due me.

Once I became sincere, good things began to happen to me. My first experience in overcoming fear was three weeks later when I applied for a position with a national organization. After numerous questions I was finally asked why I had left the company I had been with six years. I replied that I had been fired for being a drunk. The manager was flabbergasted and so completely astounded by the truth that he refused to believe me. I referred him to my former employer but he refused to write him—but he did give me the job.

It has been three and a half years since I made that decision. Those years have been the happiest years of

374 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

my life. The little girl, who was big enough to tell me the nasty truth when I needed it, is now my wife.

Eight months ago I went to another city to set up a new business. I had sufficient money to last me several months. What I wanted to accomplish could have been done under ordinary circumstances in about two weeks. The obstacles I have encountered and overcome are hard to enumerate. At least twenty times I have been sure that I would be doing business within the next twenty-four hours and at least twenty times something has happened which later made it seem that the business never would get started.

While I am writing this I happen to be at the low point of the twenty first time. Money is exhausted. All recent developments have been unfavorable, everything seems on the surface to be wrong. Yet I am not discouraged. I am not blue. I feel no bitterness toward these people who have tried to obstruct the progress of the business, and somehow I feel because I have tried hard, played square, and met situations, that something good will come from this whole

experience. It may not come the way I want it, but I sincerely believe that it will come the way that it is best.

ON HIS WAY

IN EARLY youth I believe I had some of the tendencies which lead to alcoholism. I refer to attempted escapes from reality.

At fifteen and sixteen, although free at home to drink small amounts of beer and wine, I drank considerable quantities of stronger liquors at school and other places. Not enough to cause serious worry, but enough apparently to give me occasionally what I thought I wanted. Escape? A feeling of superiority? I do not know.

I then decided I'd had enough of school, which decision was probably shared by the schools. The next few years were spent in civil engineering work, travel, sports, and a little idleness, and I seem to have avoided alcoholic difficulties of the more pronounced kind.

Immediately before marriage and in the short time before sailing for France, alcohol began to take a real part in my life. A year and a half in war time France postponed the inevitable and the post war period of hopes and plans brought me nearer and nearer to the point where I eventually found myself to be an alcoholic. Not that I would have admitted it then, having the alcoholic's usual facility for deception, both to self and others.

Divorced, sometimes suspecting that drinking was the basis for most of my troubles but never admitting it, I had enough left in health, interests of various

376 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

kinds, and luck to carry on with considerable success. About this time I stopped all social drinking. I became a periodical drunkard, the sprees lasting from three days to three weeks and the dry intervals lasting from three weeks to four months.

During one of the best years, I made a happy marriage and the age of thirty-five found me with the following: a beautiful little home presided over by a kind, understanding, and lovely wife; a partnership in a firm I had helped to found years before; more than a comfortable income; many luxuries and many friends; opportunity to follow my interests and hobbies; a love of my work; pride in my success; great health; optimism; and hope on the credit side. On the other hand, I had a growing, gnawing fear of my recurring trouble.

I slipped by far too easy stages to the bottom in less than eight years. Not a pleasant place, the bottom. Sometimes I slept in a cheap hotel or rooming house, sometimes a flop house, sometimes the back room of a police station and once in a doorway; many times in the alcoholic ward at a hospital, and once in a subway toilet. Sometimes decently fed, clothed, and housed, I worked at my business on commission with a large firm; sometimes I dared not appear there cold, hungry, with torn clothes, shaking body and muddled brain advertising what I had become. Helpless, hopeless, bitter.

Sometimes I was apparently on the way back, and sometimes writhing in bed for days at a time, terrorized by the fear of insanity and by the spectres of people without faces, people with horrible faces, people grimacing and laughing at me and my misery. Tortured

by dreams from which I would awake with a scream of agony and bathed in cold sweat. Tortured by day dreams of what might have been, dreams of the kindness, faith and love that had been heaped upon me.

Due to this last however, and to what little remained of my former self and perhaps to some lingering power of spiritual faith, I became somewhat better. Not well, but better.

This helped me to take stock and to try to do some clear thinking. I found my inventory somewhat mixed, but as my thoughts became clearer, I grew much better and at last arrived at that point where for the first time in several years I could see some light and hope ahead of me. Through a haze of doubt and skepticism I began to realize, partly at least, many things in myself which had greased the path I had pursued, and some vague thoughts and ideas came to me that are now crystallizing with the help of the men I have been happy to join.

What thoughts and ideas? The answer is short, although the road to it is long and tedious.

My intelligence, instead of drawing me further away from spiritual faith is bringing me closer to it. I no longer react in quite the same way when my will and desires are apparently frustrated.

The simple words "Thy Will Be Done" and the simple ideas of honesty and of helping others are taking on a new meaning for me. I should not be surprised to find myself coming to the astounding conclusion that God, whoever or whatever He may be, is eminently more capable of running this universe than I am. At last I believe I am on my way.

AN ALCOHOLIC'S WIFE

I HAVE the misfortune, or I should say the good fortune of being an alcoholic's wife. I say misfortune because of the worry and grief that goes with drinking, and good fortune because we found a new way of living.

My husband did not drink, to my knowledge, for several years after we were married. Then we started on an occasional Saturday night party. As I drank nothing except an occasional highball I soon became what was called a "wet blanket." The parties became more frequent and more often I was left at home.

I would sit up and wait for him. As each car passed the house I would return to walking the floor and crying and feeling so sorry for myself, thinking, "Here I am left at home to take care of the baby and him out having a good time."

When he did return sometimes on Sunday and sometimes a week later, it usually called for a scene. If he was still drunk I would put him to bed and cry some more. If he was sober it would mean I would say all the things I had been thinking and cry some more. He usually got drunk again.

I finally went to work as the bills worried me. I thought if I worked and got the bills paid he would quit drinking. He had no money in the bank but would write checks as he knew I would pay them for the boy's sake and in the hopes that each time would be the last.

AN ALCOHOLIC'S WIFE 379

I thought I should have a lot of credit, as I was paying his bills, taking care of the house and baby, besides my work, making as much money as he was, doing without things I wanted so he could have a good time.

I always went to church and thought I was living a Christian life. After my husband came in contact with Alcoholics Anonymous I thought our troubles were over as I was sure all our trouble was his drinking.

I soon found out that there was a lot wrong with me. I was selfish with my money, time, and thoughts. I was selfish about my time because I was always tired and had no time left for my family's pleasure or to do God's work. All I did was go to Sunday School and Church on Sunday with the boy and thought that was all God wanted me to do. I would be irritable and lose my temper and say all manner of things which usually called for another drunk and me pitying myself all over again.

Since giving my husband's problem to God I have found a peace and happiness. I know that when I try to take care of the problems of my husband I am a stumbling block as my husband has to take his problems to God the same as I do.

My husband and I now talk over our problems and trust in a Divine Power. We have now started to live. When we live with God we want for nothing.

AN ARTIST'S CONCEPT

"There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which can not fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance—that principle is contempt prior to investigation."

—Herbert Spencer

THE above quotation is descriptive of the mental attitudes of many alcoholics when the subject of religion, as a cure, is first brought to their attention. It is only when a man has tried everything else, when in utter desperation and terrific need he turns to something bigger than himself, that he gets a glimpse of the way out. It is then that contempt is replaced by hope, and hope by fulfillment.

In this personal story I have endeavored to relate something of my experience in the search for spiritual help rather than a description of the neurotic drinking that made the search necessary. After all, the pattern of most alcoholic experiences fits a pretty general mold. Experiences differ because of circumstances, environment, and temperament, but the after effects, both physical and mental, are almost identical. It makes but little difference how or why a man becomes an alcoholic once this disease manifests itself. The preventive measures adopted for alcoholic tendencies in the future will have to be found in a more progressive program of mental hygiene and medical research than is now obtainable.

AN ARTIST'S CONCEPT 381

It is important that at present we believe there is only one sure pathway to recovery for any alcoholic.

In my own case I was not entirely ignorant of the causes that led me into excessive drinking. In a desperate effort to eliminate these causes, to find a means to better mental and physical health, I investigated the alcoholic problem from every angle. Medicine, psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis absorbed my interest and supplied me with a great deal of general and specific

information. It led me in the end, however, to the fact that for me here was a mental and physical disease that science had placed in the category of "incurables." Briefly, all that this study and research ever did for me was to show something about WHY I drank. It substantiated a fact I had known all along, that my drinking was symptomatic. It did point out a road to better mental health but it demanded something of me in return that I did not have to give. It asked of me a power of self-will but it did not take into consideration that this self-will was already drugged with poison—that it was very sick. Intuitively I also knew that a person constrained to temperance by the domination of will is no more "cured" of his vice than if he were locked up in prison. I knew that somehow, some way, the mental stream, the emotions, must be purified before the right pathway could be followed.

It was about this time that I began "flirting" with religion as a possible way out. I approached the subject in a wary, none too reverent, attitude. I believed in an omnipotent God or Deity, but the orthodox approach through the church, with its dogma and ritual,

382 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

left me unmoved. The more I struggled to gain an intelligent grasp upon spiritual development, the more confused I became. On the other hand a purely materialistic viewpoint that postulated a "mechanical order of things" seemed too negative even to entertain. As an artist I had spent too much time communing with nature—trying to place upon canvas or paper my emotional feelings, not to know that a tremendous spiritual power was back of the universe. There was, however, so much that seemed illogical or sentimental about religion in general—so many doubts assailed me, so many problems to be confronted—yet there was within myself a strong and urgent desire for spiritual satisfaction. The occasional periods in which I felt a spiritual emotion, I immediately examined with all the ardor of the inveterate analyst. Was this emotion just a form of religious ecstasy? Was it fear? Was it just blind belief or had I tapped something?

"Most men," wrote Thoreau, "lead lives of quiet desperation." It was the articulation of this despair that led to my drinking in the beginning. Religion, so far, had only added to my desperation. I drank more than ever.

A seed had been planted, however, and a short time afterward I met the man who has for the past five years devoted a great deal of time and energy to helping alcoholics. Looking back on that meeting, the simplicity of his talk with me is amazing. He told me very little but what I already knew, in part, but what he did have to say was bereft of all fancy spiritual phraseology—it was simple Christianity imparted with Divine Power. The

AN ARTIST'S CONCEPT 383

next day I met over twenty men who had achieved a mental rebirth from alcoholism. Here again it was not so much what these men told me in regard to their experiences that was impressive, as it was a sense or feeling that an invisible influence was at work. What was it this man had and these other men exemplified without their knowing? They were human everyday sort of people. They certainly were not pious. They had no "holier than thou" attitude. They were not reformers, and their concepts of religion in some cases were almost inarticulate. But they had something! Was it just their sincerity that was magnetic? Yes, they certainly were sincere, but much more than that emanated

from them. Was it their great and terrible need, now being fulfilled, that made me feel a vibratory force that was new and strange? Now I was getting closer and suddenly, it seemed to me, I had the answer. These men were but instruments. Of themselves they were nothing.

Here at last was a demonstration of spiritual law at work. Here was spiritual law working through human lives just as definitely and with the same phenomena expressed in the physical laws that govern the material world.

These men were like lamps supplied with current from a huge spiritual dynamo and controlled by the rheostat of their souls. They burned dim, bright, or brilliant, depending upon the degree and progress of their contact. And this contact could only be maintained just so long as they obeyed that spiritual law.

These men were thinking straight—therefore their actions corresponded to their thoughts. They had given

384 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

themselves, their minds, over to a higher power for direction. Here, it seemed to me, in the one word "Thought"—was the crux of the whole spiritual quest. That "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" and so is his health, his environment, his failure, or his success in life.

How foolish I had been in my quest for spiritual help. How selfish and egotistical I had been to think that I could approach God intellectually. In the very struggle to obtain faith I had lost it. I had given to the term faith a religious significance only. I had failed to see that faith was "our common everyday manner of thinking." That good and evil were but end results of certain uniform and reliable spiritual laws. Obviously, my own thinking had been decidedly wrong. Normal most of the time, it was abnormal at the wrong times. Like everyone's thinking, it was a mixture of good and bad, but mainly it was uncontrolled.

I had been sticking my chin out and getting socked by spiritual law until I was punch drunk. If one could become humble, if he could become "as a little child" before this powerful spiritual thought force, the pathway could be discovered.

The day I made my first efforts in this direction an entire new world opened up for me. Drinking as a vicious habit was washed completely out of my consciousness. I have never even been tempted to take a drink since. As a matter of fact there are so many other things within myself that need correction that the drink habit looks silly in comparison. Please do not assume that all this is but an exposition of spiritual pride. A

AN ARTIST'S CONCEPT 385

chart of my spiritual progress would look like the "graph" of a business that had been hit by everything but an earthquake. But there has been progress. It has cured me of a vicious habit. Where my life had been full of mental turmoil there is now an ever increasing depth of calmness. Where there was a hit or miss attitude toward living there is now new direction and force.

The approaches of man to God are many and varied. My conception of God as Universal Mind is after all but one man's approach to and concept of the Supreme Being. To me it makes sense, opens up a fascinating field of endeavor and is a challenge, the acceptance of which can make of life the "Adventure Magnificent."

THE ROLLING STONE

AFTER the breaking up of our home, my Father went west and took up his work and became fairly successful.

Then it was decided that I should be sent to a preparatory school so to a midwestern school I was sent. It didn't last long for I got into a jam and left.

I went to Chicago, wrote my Father and he sent me fare to come on west, which I did. I started in to High School after I got there, but I had no companionship, for my Father was away most of the day and when he came in he always spent the evenings reading and studying.

This all caused me to become very bitter towards anything religious, because I felt that I was only in his way when he wanted to read his religious books and he took only enough interest in me to leave a dollar on the dresser each morning to buy my meals with. It caused me to become so hostile towards anything religious that I formed a hatred against religion which I was to carry for years.

During the time which I spent by myself, I had found that I could buy wine and loaf around saloons and it wasn't long before I had formed a taste for drink. I was only about fourteen years old then, but I looked eighteen.

When vacation time came I wanted to go to San

THE ROLLING STONE 387

Francisco. My father willingly let me go and after seeing the sights of that city I decided I wanted to go to sea and see the world, so it was only a short time before I found myself signed as an apprentice at sea and leading a new life.

In the meantime my mother had married again. I knew she was well taken care of so my letters were few and my visits home were years apart, and through the selfish interest I had taken in myself I never gave a thought to how worried she might be over me. I had become a person wrapped up in my own life only and giving no thought of anyone else.

Starting to sea out of San Francisco brought me in and out of port there a great deal so I considered San Francisco my home, and as I had arrived there about 1905 I knew the old San Francisco of before the earthquake where the lid was off and vice flourished at all times.

In my young life I saw all and knew all and considered myself well able to play the game as others did.

I developed into a steady drinker and, when going to sea, was sure I took enough liquor along to take care of me for the trip. When we arrived at a foreign port we would go ashore and proceed to see the sights which mostly started at the first saloon. If American liquor was not to be had or was too high in cost then we would drink their native drink, and as I look back it hardly seems possible that I have a brain left to remember with for I have done about everything possible to destroy it by over-indulgence in alcohol.

I have been to most of the ports in this world; have

388 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

stayed in some for some time; have put in a winter in Alaska; lived in the tropics; but no time did I ever find a place where I could not get liquor.

I quit the sea when I was just past 20. I had become interested in construction work, also had studied some art and learned the Freco decorating trade. Eventually I went into the building trade and have followed that ever since. I had always made good wages or made good at contracting, but was ever a rolling stone, never staying in one place long and drinking just the same as in my sea-faring days.

I had always a certain respect for myself and I carried my liquor well for years; knew enough not to make a show of myself and stopped when I had enough.

Then came the war. I was 29 years old and was in Texas when I went into the army and went overseas from there. After leaving Texas I found out that we were stopping in my home town for an hour and I received permission to call my mother when we arrived there, so fortunately I was able to get her down to the train before I left.. I had not been home in 11 years and I then told her if I came back alive I would come home to stay.

I had not been in the service long before I was a high ranking non-commissioned officer, for I had learned army discipline years before in the army transport service and while in this country and when behind the lines in France this gave me a chance to get my liquor when my buddies couldn't.

But when we got to the front lines it was the first

THE ROLLING STONE 389

time in years that I was unable to get my daily share of alcohol but, when it was possible, I never missed.

On into Germany for six months where I made up for lost time. "Schnapps" was barred to American Troops but I got mine. After coming back to the U.S. I received an honorable discharge and came back to my home and mother.

Then I started trying to break away from liquor but it did not last. The last few years found me in all kinds of mixups for I had at last developed into an alcoholic.

When I drank I would get to the state where it required a doctor to straighten me out. The times I have had to rely upon doctors are numerous. I even tried sanitariums for relief. I had plenty of suffering thrown in but still I would drift back again to that first drink and off again I went.

I wanted to quit but each time I drank it was worse than before. The misery that my mother went through was unbelievable for I had become her sole support. I was willing to try anything if I could only get a release from this curse. I knew it was breaking up my home and I was losing everyone that was dear to me.

For a few months I was successful in discontinuing drinking. Then all of a sudden I fell again. I lost my position and thought I was through.

When I was told of a doctor who had been successful in overcoming alcohol and was asked to go and see him in a nearby city, I consented but with a feeling that it was just another cure.

From him and a number of other men, however, I found it was possible to become a man again. He sug-

390 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

gested my entrance into a hospital to clear my mind and build me up. Meals had become a thing of the past for me. I had lost all appetite for food but forced myself to eat a little to survive.

This doctor told me that unless I was sincere in wanting to quit drinking, I would be wasting his time and mine and also money in doing this. My answer was I would try anything that would release me.

I went into the hospital and started to build my body up again through proper nourishment, and my mind through a different method than I had ever known of.

A religious awakening was conveyed to me through some unseen force. I at one time would have laughed at such a possibility because I had tried it and failed because I had not applied it properly. I, at last, was shown the way by these men to whom I am now most grateful.

I am now 50 years old, unmarried, have become sane and sensible again, have made my mother happy and brought back those who were dear to me, have made many new friends, mix where I never mixed before, received back my old position. I have the respect of my fellow men and have learned how to actually live and really enjoy life. It has been nearly a year and a half since I have found this new life and I know as long as I do the few things that God requires me to do, I never will take another drink.

LONE ENDEAVOR

AS A mother looked idly through a small medical journal, an article written by a doctor on alcoholism caught her attention. Anything in reference to this subject was worthy of perusal, for her son, an only child, had been drinking uncontrollably for years. Each year of his drinking had added new heart-aches, though every small ray of hope had been investigated, and though he had tried desperately to stop. But little had been accomplished. He was occasionally able to remain sober for short periods at a time, but things constantly became worse.

So this mother read the short medical article with a heavy heart, for she was constantly on the alert to find something which might prove helpful to her son.

The article gave only a vague hint of the solution found by many alcoholics, which is fully covered in this book, but the mother immediately wrote to the doctor explaining her heart-breaking problem, and requesting further information. She felt there must be help somewhere, and surely if other men had recovered from alcoholism, her son also had a chance.

The doctor turned her letter over to Alcoholics Anonymous. It ended as follows:

"God knows if you can help my son, it will bring happiness to many of us who love him and ache with him in his futile effort to overcome his problem.

392 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Please accept my gratitude for whatever you may be able to do and let me hear from you."

A few days later the following letter was sent to this mother. It was our initial effort to help others through the book alone.

"About a hundred men, here in the east, have found a solution for alcoholism that really works. We are now preparing a book hoping to help others who suffer in the same way, and are enclosing a rough copy of the first two chapters. As soon as possible we will forward rough copy of the rest of the proposed book."

We received no answer for some time, and later wrote again: "We are sending you a pre-publication multilith copy of 'ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS.' We would appreciate hearing about your son's condition and his reaction to this volume, as this is the first time we have had an opportunity of trying to help an alcoholic at long distance. Won't you please write us?"

Sincerely, Alcoholics Anonymous"

After another period of silence from the far west, during which time we began to think this book was inadequate without personal contact, we received a long letter from the son, himself. A letter which we feel will be of tremendous help to others who live in distant places, who feel alone and totally unable to work this program out by themselves. A letter which encompasses a man's solitary effort to take what we had to offer and carry the program through alone. Alone

LONE ENDEAVOR 393

except for one book and the help which printed pages could give; alone until he had tried our program of recovery and found spiritual comfort and help.

He wrote as follows:

"I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your letters and for 'ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS.' I have read this book from cover to cover and it is really the first time I have read anything dealing with alcoholism that made sense and showing understanding of the problems of the alcoholic. I found the personal stories very accurate as pertaining to my own experience; any one of them might have been my own story.

I started drinking in 1917 when I was 18. I enlisted in the army, soon became a non-commissioned officer, went overseas as a sergeant. I associated with older men, drank, gambled, and ran around with them, sampling everything France had to offer.

Upon my return from France I continued drinking. At that time I could get plenty tight at night, get up in the morning and go to work feeling O.K. The following fifteen years were one drunk after another which, of course, as they got worse, meant one job after another. Police Department truck driving, etc. Then in an attempt to get away from it all I enlisted in the U. S. Marine Corps. In 13 months time I drank very little and was promoted to Gunnery Sergeant, a rank that usually takes 10 or 12 years to obtain, if ever. I started drinking again. In six months I was reduced to Line Sergeant. I transferred to get away from my former associates.

Then came several years in China. China of all

394 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

places for a man who wanted to stay away from booze. My four years over, I did not re-enlist.

Came more jobs selling automobiles, real estate, etc. Then down to odd jobs. I was drinking so much no one could take a chance by giving me a steady job, such as I could easily have handled if I left the liquor alone. I married and the booze split that up. My mother was a nervous wreck. I was getting arrested for drinking three or four times a year. I had myself committed on two different occasions to State Hospitals, but soon after discharge, I was back at it again. Two years ago I went to a private hospital for a liquor cure. A week after getting out I was curious as to what would happen if I took a drink. I took it—

nothing happened. I took another—why go further. I went back to the private hospital, came out and was O.K. for a few months—then at it again.

Now previous to this and at the time of these cures, I was working at a State Hospital for the insane. I saw continually the effects of liquor but did it help me to leave it alone? No—it did not. But it did make me realize that if I did not, I would end up in the "bug-house" and someone else would be carrying the keys. After several years of working at mental institutions always in a violent ward, on account of my six feet 2 inches and 210 lbs., I realized there was too much nervous tension and every couple of months I would "blow up" and be off drunk for a week or ten days.

I left mental work and got a job at the County General Hospital where I am now in a medical ward. We get quite a few patients with D.T.s, all broken out with wine sores, etc. I steadied down a bit, but not enough. I was off 'sick' for several days every six or eight weeks.

LONE ENDEAVOR 395

I married again. A good Catholic girl whose people were used to having liquor, especially wine around the house always. She of course could not understand about my drinking—as far as that's concerned, neither could I. And all this time my poor mother and wife became more and more worried.

Mother had heard of your wonderful work and wrote a doctor. You answered with letters, and finally the book. Before the book arrived and after reading the chapters I knew that the only way to combat this curse was to ask the help of that greater Power, God. I realized it even though I was then on a binge!

I contacted a friend of mine who is liaison officer of the Disabled Veterans of the World War. He made arrangements for my care in a State Sanitarium which specializes in alcoholism. I wanted to get the liquor out of my system and start this new idea right. I explained my absence as 'Flu' and under the care of the head psychiatrist spent most of the time from Sept. 1, 1938 till Jan. 15, 1939 at the hospital having my appendix removed and a ventral hernia fixed up.

Six weeks ago I returned from the sanitarium and your book was here waiting for me. I read, more than that I pored over it so as not to miss anything. I thought to myself, yes, this is the only way. God is my only chance. I have prayed before but I guess not the right way. I have followed out the suggestions in the book, I am happier this moment than I have been in years. I'm sure I have found the solution, thanks to ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS.

I have had talks with another man, an attorney, who was at the sanitarium when I was. He has my book now and he is very much enthused.

I go down to the sanitarium every week for a

396 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

check-up and medicine which they give me, just a tonic, no sedatives. The manager has asked me to contact some of his patients along our line. How I told him I would appreciate his letting me do so!

Would you put me in touch with some 'A.A.s' out here? I know it would help me and help me to help others.

I hope you can make sense out of this letter. I could write so much more but this I have written just as it popped into my head.

Please let me hear from you."

This man's lone struggle was impressive. Wouldn't the story of his solitary recovery be helpful to many others who would have to start out by themselves with only this book to aid them?

So we immediately sent him a wire:

JUST RECEIVED LETTER. MAY WE HAVE YOUR PERMISSION TO USE LETTER ANONYMOUSLY IN BOOK AS FIRST EXAMPLE OF WHAT MIGHT BE ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT PERSONAL CONTACT. IMPORTANT YOU WIRE THIS PERMISSION AS BOOK IS GOING TO PRINTER.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

His wire arrived next day:

PERMISSION GRANTED WITH PLEASURE. LOTS OF LUCK.

APPENDIX

The man who wrote the following story disliked the profit-oriented and money-making business people of AA-"headquarters" in New York and therefore withdrew his permission to have his text printed in the first edition of the AA book. He stressed the fact that helping other alcoholics to recover should be a labor of love rather than a work of property and sales:

ACE FULL - SEVEN - ELEVEN

High school studies irked me early. I was an imaginative kid and when a small carnival came to town it seemed pretty glamorous to me. Not very big, skinny and looking like a victim of malnutrition, I made an admirable "Cigarette Fiend" for one of the side-shows, as one of the concession men told me when he propositioned me. I had a dandy hacking cough and looked very convincing on the platform as the spieler told the crowd how many hundred coffin-nails I smoked every day, how doctors had given me up and I was surely marked for the Grim Reaper. At every telling point in the ballyhoo, I would cough as if I would croak any minute. I was tickled. I was fooling the people.

That idea of fooling the people, which had its start with the carnival side-show, later dominated my whole life. I was a smart guy living by my wits, making my living by beating the other fellow. Thrown among carnival folks, I soon acquired their ways. I learned to take on a drink or two occasionally and on one night in a middle-western town got so loaded I woke up the next morning in a pig-pen. How I got there I don't even remember. I had been sick during the night and I've often wondered why the pigs tolerated me. Shortly afterward I quit the show and returned home.

My father was a pharmacist so I studied to follow in his footsteps, however, on the eve of taking the state board examination, I was ordered to report for military service. Army life contributed to the formation of my character in an important way. Like most of the boys, I didn't expect to be lucky enough to be alive when hostilities were over, so I began to live from day to day. In time of war the soldier is a gambler and tomorrow is something he is never quite sure about.

I was never more than ordinarily lucky and I knew that I couldn't get all the money I wanted by depending on luck, so I began to master the art of manipulating dice and cards. I became passionately interested in the basic arts of the profession of crooked gambling. Conscience bothered me somewhat at first, but the voice was stilled as I was soon making more money than the commanding officer of the encampment. Soon I had a house with a lady in charge outside of government property and laid in a stock of liquor and beer. My place became so popular that I was making money such as I hadn't dreamed of. I was the only real, genuine "doughboy" - I was making the dough and plenty of it.

The war ended and I returned home. I had experienced easy living and I certainly couldn't see a future of rolling pills and making up prescriptions from medical Latin. I had plenty of money and in my home town began to know and be known by the gambling fraternity, the town sports, the bookies and operators. But something kept me from making any connection with that crowd professionally in my home town. I knew how hurt my people would be, so I lit out for pastures new.

Downstate was a hell-roaring river town with almost a century old reputation for being a gambler's paradise. It was practically never a closed town except in sporadic elections of reform administrations. I allied myself with one of the best known operators in a saloon, dealing poker, craps and black-jack. I made plenty of money. I developed a strong habit of stimulating myself with liquor.

Even that exciting existence dulled after a time and I felt I ought to see the country so, finding myself a clever and congenial partner, I took to riding the "name trains" from coast to coast, always with the best the Pullman company could offer. I had an excellent wardrobe, the best-looking baggage I could get - all the essentials for the front so necessary in the profession of a train-sharper. Prohibition was now with us, and the kind of whiskey I drank was \$20.00 and more by the quart. Our plan of operation was in the best technique, based on the opening of offering something for nothing which is sure-fire appeal to human cupidity.

Traveling eventually became tiresome. I went home once more. I was now very definitely a professional but I didn't have to tie up with any outfit in particular. Working when the mood seized me, drinking steadily every day, I did not escape the fate of every gambler, getting into trouble with the authorities now and then, but always getting by because I well knew the value of protection, which was just a business proposition with me and thoroughly justifiable.

For the first time in my life, however, money failed me when I was incarcerated for eight months after hiring the best available mouthpiece and placing the needful where it seemed it might do me good to the tune of more than \$5,000. Even when I went behind the bars I still had plenty left. Through influence I became cook for the superintendent of the prison which opened the way to liquor for me, and I managed to be comfortably jingled most of the time I was in the pen.

When I was out on the bricks again, I decided to give my home town a wide berth for a while and went to one of the largest cities in the country to resume operations.

I wasn't much given to contemplation. Long ago I had dropped any idea that there was a God. If I ever gave any thought to myself being in this world for any other purpose than to make all the money I possibly could, I do not recall it.

I drank heavily with sober periods few and far between. In this city I operated for four years during which time I was steadily slipping in any control over liquor I might once have had. I had my first experience of hospitals, taken there helpless from continued drinking. The best medical talent in the city was always in attendance. Hospital followed hospital and I finally went from one sanitarium to another. My business still gave me a considerable income. My economic position was not bad. By this time I had married but that had no steadying influence on me.

Back I went to my home town and then my troubles really started. My domestic situation became very disagreeable. Gambling even almost lost its appeal for me and that had been my life. I quit everything to take up drinking seriously. I knew that I was a drunkard, had no hope of ever overcoming the desire for liquor, now far more necessary to continued existence than the food I ate. My wife heard of a cure at a state institution - the state insane asylum to be frank - and, unknown to me, got a court order to have me sent there. Two deputies hauled me out of bed one day and took me to the county jail for temporary lodgement. I had many friends and even the law didn't want me to be sent to the bughouse. I got as far as the county jail twice for brief periods, being released on my promise to do something about drinking. I didn't do anything about it. When I got out all I wanted was liquor.

So eventually to the bughouse I went, assigned to the alcoholic ward. I spent four months there. During that time I had no trouble getting liquor because I still had money. Again I was released. Once out, I wrecked my car, driving while intoxicated, and it seemed that I might get a stiff jail sentence so when it was suggested that I might avoid that by going back to the asylum, I accepted.

The bughouse had no terrors for me. I knew I could always get a supply of liquor and stay half stupefied most of the time. In the institution I became a nuisance to officials, attendants, and doctors. I had been in and out of the place so often that even the sincere professional medical men and psychologists had given me up. Suggestion, kindness, everything had been tried. They now regarded me as incorrigible, said nothing could be done for or with me and discharged me in a very short time.

In two months I was back again. This time I was treated like any insane person, was punished for infractions, any breaches of discipline. I could still get all the liquor I wanted through my financial reserve and that was all I cared about.

I used to talk with another inmate about this drinking business. He was a man who had lost one good job after another, had fallen from a good professional position to the status of a hobo. This fellow knew and had lived in almost every railroad jungle from coast to coast and had finally been slammed into the bughouse because his family didn't want to read about his death someday as a friendless wanderer. To me he confessed that he had tried for years to quit. I told him I had long ago discovered I couldn't and that now I didn't give a damn. But this time when I was sent back to the asylum, he wasn't there.

About the middle of my last confinement I was surprised by a visit from this fellow. He had kept me in mind and had come a considerable distance to see me. I was half-drunk when he called on me and didn't have even the haziest

idea of what he was talking about. But he asked me if I would try to follow instructions if he was successful in getting me out. Half-heartedly I told him I would, but I had no intention of cooperating. I merely wanted to get out, where I could have free access to what money I had and make a real job of drinking.

Shortly after that, my sister visited me and persuaded the authorities to let me go. They were glad to do so, being sick and tired of me. They were glad of the short respite they thought my absence would give them, I guess.

When I got home, doped with sedatives I was put to bed and managed to get a little rest. The next day my former fellow-inmate and recent visitor came from a neighboring town to see me. I was very nervous and jittery and my mind was continually on the bottle while he talked. My natural distrust for all human beings seemed diminished a little while he was talking, for I knew his story and we had something in common. He was pretty definite in his statements and finally elicited from me a promise to try to follow a certain plain~wic he now proposed to explain to me. He stressed the fact that his drinking career had been very similar to mine and much more miserable because it had made a homeless bum out of him whereas I had never been in straitened financial circumstances. I told him I would give it a trial if at all possible and invited him to keep on talking.

He began by pointing out what I couldn't dispute, that I had no faith in anything, man or God, that all my life I had lived as I pleased without any moral scruples or misgivings whatever. I admitted that I had.

"What you need is a definite religious experience," he said.

"That's the bunk." I said. "I knew there was some angle like this. Count me out. If I've got to turn around and join a church and sing hymns and holler 'Amen' when some long-bearded jasper, who spends six days out of the week skinning suckers, legally begins to pray in meeting, I don't want any part of it."

"You don't have to do that," he said. "And, anyway, the long-bearded slicker is no concern of yours. Your problem is yourself."

My friend was new to this job of helping the other fellow, but I couldn't get away from the fact that he was now sober and that he had got that way and was being kept that way by a religious experience. He made me a proposition.

"I'll come for you Wednesday night," he said. "I'll take you to where a bunch of guys who used to be pickled practically all the time meet every week. You can see and listen and judge for yourself."

With my friend I attended that meeting. I was cordially received. I knew a good many of them and listened attentively, but I say quite honestly it left me cold. Not that it was like a church service. No, it wasn't like that at all. When some stories had been told it ended up with the Lord's Prayer, then everybody sat around and visited. I was beginning to get a little scared. Now, I thought, is when they'll put the works to a guy; along about this time one of these mugs is going to get me in a corner and ask me about my soul.

Nothing of the sort happened. They invited me back again. Others asked if they could come to see me, when I'd be in and so forth. My pal stuck pretty close to me that week. Some of the gang turned up at my home and told me how they had been helped to quit drinking. I went back to the next meeting and the next and the next again. Gradually I began to see what it was all about. I listened carefully for I was now definitely interested. More or less unconsciously I was seeking for something. I didn't know it then, but I think I was surely

seeking God. Now, I didn't find God suddenly. You must remember that God was never in any of my plans. The former cynical, gambler-slicker who didn't even believe much that there was honor among thieves, gradually learned that Love is the law of God. I, who had strictly followed the injunction that you should never give a sucker an even break, had to learn that God demands we be honest if we are to follow His teachings.

I am writing this in the Thanksgiving season. It is a great privilege to have the fine human friendship and association of this gang of former drunks. It is an even greater privilege when I can be of service in helping some guy to a remedy which is his for the taking.

But if friends and fellowship were to disappear tomorrow I don't think I would be dismayed. Back of all that there is the knowledge that I have a Divine Father - that as long as I try to walk as He has laid down for me to do throughout my life, nothing of ill can befall me, that if I wish I can be sober for the rest of my days.

I have a simple little job on which I make less in a month than I formerly made in a day, but that doesn't worry me. I know there is something far better than mere dollars. There isn't a gambling house of note that wouldn't be glad to have me as an operator, for the owners know I'm capable, that I can bring and keep business. In fact, some who know, think I would be a greater asset than ever for they have confidence that I would make an honest accounting of receipts.

No, I don't have much money nowadays, but I don't need any. I am quite sure that God doesn't want me to go back to the green tables and the shaded lights again. It might even be possible that I could go back to my former profession and stay sober, but I doubt it. Accustomed to coldly calculating the odds all my life, I'm of the opinion that they would be definitely against me.

His Will must be my bet - There's no other way!

Prologue

Efforts are being made by AA members in the U.S. to distribute books to those alcoholics who cannot afford to buy a big book — for example those in the correctional facilities. Here is a paperback book containing a 1st edition reprint including the story section. This book is distributed entirely for free and dedicated to newcomers who seek relief from alcoholism.

The whole text is in the public domain. AA can claim no proprietary right to the recovery program, for our principles, as all spiritual truths, are regarded as available to all mankind¹.

The 1st edition was published from 1939 to 1955. During this time, the recovery rates were highest. Should a 4th edition better reflect the fellowship of today, or should the fellowship of today better reflect our good old book? Of alcoholics who really tried the program as outlined in the 1st edi-

¹ See also: AA Service Manual pg.S100, Bylaws of the General Service Board, Inc.

tion, 50% got sober immediately and remained that way; more than 25% sobered up after some relapses². We'd love to repeat those marvelous results. The stories of the 1st edition tell us how the founders of our Fellowship applied spiritual principles to their lives and escaped alcoholic hell; all the early Akron veterans—a dozen and a half of them—whose stories are the backbone of the 1st edition and who, together with Dr. Bob, had created the first AA group in the world³. The Cleveland pioneers had proved three essential things: the value of personal sponsorship; the worth of the A.A. book in indoctrinating newcomers, and finally the tremendous fact that A.A., when the word really got around, could now soundly grow to great size⁴.

To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book. It is given to you by members of AA groups. We are not allied with any particular faith or organization, nor do we oppose anyone. We simply wish to be helpful to those who are afflicted⁵.

This book was unselfishly written and edited by a team of about 40 people 60 years ago. It should carry the message to new areas and keep it undiluted and unchanged. We will briefly outline the chain of events and historical facts that made us come to believe that we would pass on this low-cost book at no charge. We do so, because we are not an organization in the conventional sense of the word. There are no fees or dues whatsoever⁶.

In a speech delivered in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1954, Bill Wilson reported:

So, on this late Fall afternoon in 1937, Smithy and I were talking together in his living room, Anne sitting there when we began to count noses. How many people had stayed dry; in Akron, in New York, maybe a few in Cleveland? How many had stayed dry and for how long?

And when we added up the total, it sure was a handful of, I don't know, 35, 40 maybe. But enough time had elapsed on enough really fatal cases of alcoholism, so that we grasped the importance of these small statistics. Bob and I saw for the first time that this thing was going to succeed. That God in His providence and mercy had thrown a new light into the dark caves where we and our kind had been and were still dwelling by the millions. I never can forget the elation and ecstasy that seized us both. And then we sat happily talking and reflecting. We reflected that well, a couple of score of drunks were sober but this had taken three long years. There had been an immense amount of failure and a long time had been taken just to sober up the handful. How could this handful carry its message to all those who still didn't know? Not all the drunks in the world could come to Akron or to New York. How could we transmit our message to them, and by what means?

... That evening Bob and I told them that we were within sight of success and that we thought this thing might go on and on and on, that a

2 See also: FOREWORD TO 2nd EDITION, pg. XX

3 See also: AA Comes of Age, pg.7

4 See also: AA Comes of Age, pg.22

5 See also: FOREWORD TO FIRST EDITION

6 See also: FOREWORD TO FIRST EDITION

new light indeed was shining in our dark world. But how could this light be a reflection and transmitted without being distorted and garbled? And at this point, they turned the meeting over to me, and being a salesman, I set right to work on the drunk tanks and subsidies for the missionaries, I was pretty poor then. And we touched on the book. The group conscience consisted of 18 men good and true and you could see right away that these 18 good and true men were damned skeptical about it all. Almost with one voice, they chorused "Let's keep it simple. This is going to bring money into this thing. Think, this is going to create a professional class. We'll all be ruined."

This early opinion during later years crystallized in the conviction that nothing could so surely destroy our spirituality as futile disputes over property, money, and authority. We should remain forever non-professional. To carry the message face to face or in print is never to be paid for⁷.

In a letter of April 27th, 1944, Clarence S., founder of the first AA meeting in Cleveland (The Home Brewmeister) wrote:

It was my understanding at the time the book was published that should there be any profits accrue from the sale of the book, after the stockholders were paid and the plates etc. cleared, that money was to go to the Foundation and we hoped to get out a dollar copy of the book for wide distribution ... in order that no one should have a financial interest in the book and any profits could be used for the furtherance of the "Labor of Love".

Mr. Leonard V. Harrison, *Chairman of the Alcoholic Foundation*, answered on official letterhead July 7th, 1944, and on page 4 wrote in response to Clarence:

Mr. Wilson tells me that later on, about 1941, he did talk to you about the desirability of a \$1.00 book. He said he thought such a book might be printed from the old plates when the debts were paid and a new edition came out ...

In the past, A.A. groups contributed enough to cover about two-thirds of the service expense. The remainder was covered by publishing income, which was in excess of that required for publishing expense. So, in 1986, the General Service Board asked for a special effort to inform the Fellowship of the dangers inherent in this situation; particularly that a substantial fraction of the publishing income now comes from outside sources—in violation of our 7th tradition. The effort was begun to inform the groups about this growing problem. The challenge was to make G.S.O.'s service work self-supporting through contributions of the membership and to sell literature at cost to everyone⁸.

To make our service work independent from literature profits is mandatory for Concept VII⁹ and Concept X¹⁰. If our service work would rely on income from literature sales rather than solely on our group's voluntary contributions, any manger of an AA corporation could say "I don't care what

8 See also: AA Service Manual, pg. S130, How G.S.O. Is Supported

7 See also: Traditions 7 and 8, original long form

AA groups want. Forget about their two cents, we can do as we please since we get enough money from our literature sales.” Our traditional “power of the A.A. purse”⁹ would become a bad joke¹⁰.

Some of us said to ourselves: “Let it begin with us!” We can start and do that just for today. For we are now on a different basis — the basis of trusting and relying upon God. We trust infinite God rather than our finite selves. We are in the world to play a role He assigns¹¹.

So several years ago a few recovered alcoholics were sitting together and felt deeply touched by these circumstances. They committed themselves to spread the word and take action. And many alcoholics from America and Europe combined their efforts, offered voluntary work and threw their “two cents” into the hat—to express their gratitude for the recovery and freedom from bondage they found for themselves. Let’s hear their report:

In 1997 this process prepaid 75,000 mini editions of the 11 chapters plus the *Foreword* and *The Doctors Opinion* plus a two-page U.S.-wide Intergroup phone directory. These booklets were badly needed in the California correctional system and mostly distributed to inmates by local AA members and by chaplains inside the walls. Considerable numbers also went to correctional facility committees in the Midwest and to the East Coast. One member reported, that inmates were now surprisingly allowed by authorities to keep these little books all the time and take them to their cells, providing the possibility to read them now and then. Strange but true, the usual regular editions were prohibited and could only be read during meetings or at the library. The corrections officers were afraid that some prisoners could misuse the hard-backed books as weapons.

Also 5000 Spanish translations of the 1st edition (without the story section) went into the California facilities and another 20,000 went to Mexico. Russian alcoholics, having practically no financial resources of their own in those currently rough times, gratefully received 50,000 mini editions in a new and modern language translation, which is—by the way—more accurate and thus closer to our original than the previous one, which omitted whole paragraphs of the English text. Many of our fellows in Sweden, especially newcomers, could not afford to buy a book for US\$44.00,

9 See also: AA Service Manual, pg. S102 and Concept VII pg 29 “The Charter and Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments, empowering the trustees to manage and conduct world service affairs. The Conference Charter is not a legal document; it relies upon tradition and the A.A. purse for final effectiveness.

10 See also: AA Service Manual, Concept X, pg. 44 “For example, if the groups are dissatisfied with the Conference, they can elect better Delegates or withhold funds. If the Delegates must, they can censure or reorganize the Trustees. The Trustees can do the same with the service corporations. If a corporation does not approve of the operations of its executives or staff, any or all of them can be fired.”

11 See also: Chapter Five of this book, pg.80 in this edition, pg.68 in the 2nd and 3rd edition

nor could alcoholics in Finland, where books sold for US\$49.30 per copy at that time. With the help of a German group both countries got a carload of 5000 mini editions each—for free. Meanwhile the textbooks became a powerful tool for 12th step work throughout the countryside and in prisons and treatment centers as well. 5000 Hebrew mini editions were put out.

The German Fellowship was presented with close to 30,000 free German mini editions. This became necessary, because three different “official” translations had been published in that country since 1962—all rather more than less stray from our English text. The deviation of the latest edition (1983-1996) was so serious, that A.A.W.S. General Manager George D. said, when he was made aware of that situation by a delegation of German members, that came to N.Y. in 1996: *“Neither you nor anyone else may change anything in the wording of the Steps and Traditions. Never! Neither may any word be dropped. It has to be translated as closely as possible to the original.”* And he added: *“You have to work this out within your German service structure! Don’t tell me anything but get in contact with them.”* German G.S.O. has meanwhile improved the quality of their German translation and has offered both hardcover and pocket editions at a 20% discount since then.

Most of us feel we need look no further for Utopia. As you see, improvements have become possible. We follow the path suggested by our 1986 General Service Conference and carry the message, prepaid by 7th tradition contributions, in a strictly non-professional way. Each day some member’s simple talk at our kitchen table multiplies itself in a widening circle of peace on earth and good will to men¹².

Parallel to these astonishing events, ordinary group members, along with past and present trusted servants from throughout the U.S. and some other countries including GSRs, DCMs, conference delegates, AA archivists, committee chairmen and even one past A.A. General Service Board trustee, attempted to coordinate those wide-spread activities somewhat, putting them on more shoulders, on a solid service structure base and went ahead.

We have now accumulated some 7th tradition money, that makes it possible to provide a full 1st edition reprint—including all of the stories. Pretty good stuff! We hope it will serve many newcomers and help them acquire lasting sobriety.

Inquiries from individuals, groups, big book study meetings, Intergroups, C.S.O.s or committees are welcome. We will be happy to help as much as possible.

12 See also: End of Chapter One, pg. 26 in this edition, pg. 16 in the 2nd and 3rd edition

EL LIBRO AZUL

Traducción española
del texto básico de la Edición de los Pioneros
de Alcohólicos Anónimos 1939 / 1955

Es así que el propósito principal de este libro es
el informar a otras personas alcohólicas, en una
manera detallada, la forma en que hemos podido restablecernos.



Spanish

Синяя книга

Любой, кто хочет бросить пить, может
присоединиться к нам. Мы освободились
от одержимости пить и можем ежедневно
наслаждаться новым образом жизни в трезвости.



Russian

The Little Big Book

How more than 100 men and
women have recovered from a
seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.

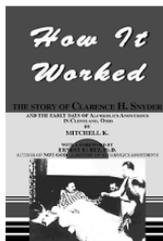


English

הספר הגדול

Hebrew

All books available for free
from AA BBSG, Washingtonville



HOW IT WORKED

The Story of Clarence S. and the Early History of AA in
Cleveland, Ohio; 256 pages, many photos

This reprint is endorsed and approved by :

1. Past Northeast Region Class B Trustee, Maine;
2. AA archivist, New York;
3. Past Delegate Panel 43, Massachusetts;
4. Past Delegate Panel 41, Area 65,
5. GSR, Past AA magazine editor, Germany;
6. Past Class B Trustee and Past AA magazine controller, Mexico;
7. Past Alternate Delegate, Panel 43, Massachusetts,
8. group secretary, South Germany;
9. AA member, Los Angeles, sober in AA since July 24, 1962;
10. Alt. Sec'y, Area 30, Massachusetts;
11. Past Delegate Panel 44 Area 56 Southwest Ohio;
12. AA member, Florida;
13. AA member, date of sobriety 4/11/87, Maine;
14. Past DCMC, District 02, California Northern Coastal Area, USA;
15. Past Area Registration Chair, Area 05, Thousand Oaks, California;
16. GSR, Simi Valley, California;
17. GSR, Berwick, Maine, continually sober in AA since 1983;

who else ... Would you join us?

Names omitted here for anonymity on public level. To contact us and to get books write to AA Big Book Study Group:

BBSG, P.O. Box 31, Washingtonville, NY 10992-0031

Back to Basics, P. O. Box 6656, Thousand Oaks, CA 91359-6656

e-mail: aabbsg@aol.com, HOW_IT_WORKED@excite.com

Note: To support our work and to give more free books away to those coming after you, we accept 7th tradition contributions from AA members only. (Make checks payable to "BBSG" or "Back to Basics" as applicable.)

ISBN 0-9663282-2-1 \$ 0.00

No copyright secured!

Now available



The 4th Edition

The 4th Edition



How more than 100 men and women have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.

ISBN 0-9663282-2-1

US\$ 0.00