

Alcohol, Science and Society

Twenty-nine Lectures with Discussions

as given at the

Yale Summer School of Alcohol Studies

Lecture 29

The Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous

W. W.

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MY first task is a joyous one; it is to voice the sincere gratitude that every member of Alcoholics Anonymous present feels tonight that we can stand in the midst of such an assembly. I know that in this assembly there are many different points of view, that we have social workers, ministers, doctors and others—people we once thought did not understand us, because we did not understand them. I think right away of one of our clergyman friends. He helped start our group in St. Louis, and when Pearl Harbor came he thought to himself, “Well, this will be a hard day for the A.A.’s.” He expected to see us go off like firecrackers. Well, nothing much happened and the good man was rather joyously disappointed, you might say. But he was puzzled. And then he noticed with still more wonder that the A.A.’s seemed rather less excited about Pearl Harbor than the normal people. In fact, quite a number of the so-called normal people seemed to be getting drunk and very distressed. So he went up to one of the A.A.’s and said, “Tell me, how is it that you folks hold up so well under this stress, I mean this Pearl Harbor?” The A.A. looked at him, smiled, but quite seriously said, “You know, each of us has had his own private Pearl Harbor, each of us has known the utmost of humiliation, of despair, and of defeat. So why should we, who know the resurrection, fear another Pearl Harbor?”

So you can see how grateful we are that we have found this resurrection and that so many people, not alcoholics, with so many points of view, have joined to make it a reality. I guess all of you know Marty Mann by this time. I shall always remember her story about her first A.A. meeting. She had been in a sanatorium under the care of a wonderful doctor, but how very lonely she felt! Somehow, there was a gap between that very good man and herself which could not quite be bridged. Then she went to her first A.A. meeting, wondering what she would find; and her words, when she returned to the sanatorium, in talking to her friend, another alcoholic, were: “Grenny, we are no longer alone.” So we are a people who have known loneliness, but now stand here in the midst of many friends. Now I am sure you can see how very grateful for all this we must be.

I am sure that in this course you have heard that alcoholism is a malady; that something is dead wrong with us physically; that our reaction to alcohol has changed; that something has been very wrong with us emotionally; and that our alcoholic habit has become an obsession, an obsession which can no longer reckon even with death itself. Once firmly set, one is not able to turn it aside. In other words, a sort of allergy of the body which guarantees that we shall die if we drink, an obsession of the mind which guarantees that we shall go on drink-

ing. Such has been the alcoholic's dilemma time out of mind, and it is altogether probable that even those alcoholics who did not wish to go on drinking, not more than 5 out of 100 have ever been able to stop, before A.A.

That statement always takes my mind back to a summer night at a drying-out place in New York where I lay upstairs at the end of a long trail. My wife was downstairs talking with the doctor, asking him, "Bill so badly wants to stop this thing, doctor, why can't he? He was always considered a person of enormous persistence, even obstinacy, in those things that he wished to achieve. Why can't his will power work now? It does work even yet in other areas of life, but why not in this?" And then the doctor went on to tell her something of my childhood, showing that I had grown up a rather awkward kid, how that had thrown upon me a kind of inferiority and had inspired in me a fierce desire to show other people that I could be like them; how I had become a person who abnormally craved approval, applause. He showed her the seed, planted so early, that had created me an inferiority-driven neurotic. On the surface, to be sure, very self-confident, with a certain amount of worldly success in Wall Street. But along with it this habit of getting release from myself through alcohol.

You know, as strange as it may seem to some of the clergy here who are not alcoholic, the drinking of alcohol is a sort of spiritual release. Is it not true that the great fault of all individuals is abnormal self-concern? And how well alcohol seems temporarily to expel those feelings of inferiority in us, to transport us temporarily to a better world. Yes, I was one of those people to whom drink became a necessity and then an addiction. So it was 10 years ago this summer that the good doctor told my wife I could not go on much longer; that my habit of adjusting my neurosis with alcohol had now become an obsession; how that obsession of my mind condemned me to go on drinking, and how my physical sensitivity guaranteed that I would go crazy or die, perhaps within a year. Yes, that was my dilemma. It has been the dilemma of millions of us, and still is.

Some of you wonder, "Well, he had been well instructed by a good physician, he had been told about his maladjustment, he understood himself, he knew that his increasing physical sensitivity meant that he would go out into the dark and join the endless procession. Why couldn't he stop? Why wouldn't fear hold such a man in check?"

After I left that place, fear did keep me in check for 2 or 3 months. Then came a day when I drank again. And then came a time when an old friend, a former alcoholic, called on the phone and said that he was coming over. It was perhaps right there on that very day that the Alcoholics Anonymous commenced to take shape. I remember his coming into my kitchen, where I was half drunk.

I was afraid that perhaps he had come to reform me. You know, curiously enough, we alcoholics are very sensitive on this subject of reform. I could not quite make out my friend. I could see something different about him but I could not put my finger on it. So finally I said, "Ebby, what's got into you?" And he said, "Well, I've got religion." That shocked me terribly, for I was one of those people with a dandy modern education which had taught me that self-sufficiency would be enough to carry me through life, and here was a man talking a point of view which collided with mine.

Ebby did not go on colliding with me. He knew, as a former agnostic, what

my prejudices were, so he said to me, blandly enough, "Well, Bill, I don't know that I'd call it religion exactly, but call it what you may, it works." I said, "What is it? What do you mean? Tell me more about this thing." He said, "Some people came and got hold of me. They said, 'Ebby, you've tried medicine, you've tried religion, you've tried change of environment, I guess you've tried love, and none of these things has been able to cure you of your liquor. Now here is an idea for you.'" And then he went on to tell me how they explained. They said, "First of all, Ebby, why don't you make a thorough appraisal of yourself? Stop finding fault with other people. Make a thoroughgoing moral appraisal of yourself. When have you been selfish, dishonest? And, especially, where have you been intolerant? Perhaps those are the things that underlie this alcoholism. And after you have made such an appraisal of yourself, why don't you sit down and talk it out with someone in full and quit this accursed business of living alone? Put an end to this Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde situation into which you have fallen. And then, why don't you continue this policy of abating the disturbance in yourself? Why don't you take stock of all the people among your acquaintances that you have hurt—all of the people who annoy you, who disturb you. Why don't you go to them and make amends; set things right and talk things out, and get down these strains that exist between you and them? Then, Ebby, we have still another proposal. Why don't you try the kind of giving that demands no reward? We don't mean the mere giving of money, though you once had plenty of that. No, we mean the giving of yourself to someone who is in need. Why don't you try that? Seek out someone in need and forget your own troubles by becoming interested in his." Ebby said, "Where does the religion come in?" And his friends went on to say, "Ebby, it is our experience that no one can carry out such a program with enough thoroughness and enough continuity on pure self-sufficiency. One must have help. Now we are willing to help you, as individuals, but we think you ought to call upon a power greater than yourself, for your dilemma is well-nigh insurmountable. So, call on God as you understand God. Try prayer." Well, in effect, that was the explanation my friend made to me. Those of you who know a little of the A.A. are already able to see the basic idea.

You see, here was my friend talking to me, one alcoholic talking to another. I could no longer say, "He doesn't understand me." Sure he understood me. We had done a lot of drinking together, and gone the same route of humiliation, despair and defeat. Yes, he could understand. But now he had something. He did not shock me by calling it the resurrection, but that's what it was. He had something I did not have, and those were the terms upon which it could be obtained.

Honesty with oneself and other people, the kind of giving that demands no return, and prayer. Those were the essentials. My friend then got up and went away, but he had been very careful not to force any of his views upon me. In no sense could I have the feeling that he was moralizing with me or preaching, because I knew it was not so long ago that he was no better than I. He merely said that he was leaving these ideas with me, hoping that they would help.

Even so, I was irritated, because he had struck a blow at my pet philosophy of self-sufficiency, and was talking about dependence upon some power greater

than myself. "Ah yes," I thought, as I went on drinking, "yes, it's this preacher stuff. Yes, I remember, up in the old home town where my grandfather raised me, how the deacon, who was so good, treated Ed MacDonald, the local drunk—as dirt under his feet; and more than that, the old son of a gun shortweighted my good old grandfather in his grocery store. If that's religion, I don't want any of it." Such were my prejudices. But the whole point of this is that my friend had got onto my level. He had penetrated my prejudices, although he had not yet swept them all away.

I drank on but I kept turning this thing over in my mind, and finally asked myself, "Well, how much better off am I than a cancer patient?" But a small percentage of those people recover, and the same is true with alcoholics, for by this time I knew quite a good deal about alcoholism. I knew that my chances were very, very slim. I knew that, in spite of all the vigilance in the world, this obsession would pursue me, even if I dried up temporarily. Yes, how much better off was I than a cancer patient? Then I began to say to myself, "Well, who are beggars to be choosers? Why should a man be talking about self-sufficiency when an obsession has condemned him to have none of it?" Then I became utterly willing to do anything, to try to accept any point of view, to make any sacrifice, yes, even to try to love my enemies, if I could get rid of this obsession.

First, I went up to a hospital to ask the doctor to clear me up so I could think things through clearly. And again came my friend, the second day that I was there. Again I was afraid, knowing that he had religion, that he was going to reform me. I cannot express the unreasonable prejudice that the alcoholics have against reform. That is one reason why it has been so hard to reach them. We should not be that way, but we are. And here was my friend, trying to do his best for me, but the first thought that flashed across my mind was, "I guess this is the day that he is going to try to save me. Look out! He'll bring in that high-powered sweetness and light, he'll be talking about a lot of this prayer business." But Ebby was a good general, and it's a good thing for me he was.

No, he did not collide with those prejudices of mine. He just paid me a friendly visit, and he came up there quite early in the morning. I kept waiting and waiting for him to start his reform talk, but no, he didn't. So finally I had to ask for some of it myself. I said, "Ebby, tell me once more about how you dried up." And he reviewed it again for me.

Honesty with oneself, of a kind I had never had before. Complete honesty with someone else. Straightening out all my twisted relationships as best I could. Giving of myself to help someone else in need. And prayer.

When he had gone away, I fell into a very deep depression, the blackest that I had ever known. And in that depression, I cried out, "If there is a God, will He show Himself?" Then came a sudden experience in which it seemed the room lit up. It felt as though I stood on the top of a mountain, that a great clean wind blew, that I was free. The sublime paradox of strength coming out of weakness.

So I called in the doctor and tried to tell him, as best I could, what had happened. And he said, "Yes, I have read of such experiences but I have never seen one." I said, "Well, doctor, examine me. Have I gone crazy?" And he did

examine me and said, "No, boy, you're not crazy. Whatever it is, you'd better hold onto it. It's so much better than what had you just a few hours ago." Well, along with thousands of other alcoholics, I have been holding onto it ever since.

But that was only the beginning. And at the time, I actually thought that it was the end, you might say, of all my troubles. I began then, out of this sudden illumination, not only to get benefits, but to draw some serious liabilities. One of those that came immediately and most naturally was one that you might call Divine Appointment. I actually thought, I had the conceit really to believe, that God had selected me, by this sudden flash of Presence, to dry up all the drunks in the world. I really believed it. I also got another terrific liability out of the experience, and that was that it had to happen in some particular way just like mine or else it would be of no use. In other words, I conceived myself as going out, getting hold of these drunks, and producing in them just the same kind of experience that I had had. Down in New York, where they know me pretty well in the A.A., they facetiously call these sudden experiences that we sometimes have a "W. W. hot flash." I really thought that I had been endowed with the power to go out and produce a "hot flash" just like mine in every drunk.

Well, I started off. I was inspired; I knew just how to do it, as I thought then. Well, I worked like thunder for 6 months and not one alcoholic got dried up. What were the natural reactions then? I suppose some of you here, who have worked with alcoholics, have a pretty good idea. The first reaction was one of great self-pity; the other was a kind of martyrdom. I began to say, "Well, I suppose this is the kind of stuff that martyrs are made of but I will keep on at all costs." I kept on, and I kept on, until I finally got so full of self-pity and intolerance (our two greatest enemies in the A.A.) that I nearly got drunk myself. So I began to reconsider. I began to say, "Yes, I found my relief in this particular way, and glorious it was and is, for it is still the central experience of my whole life. But who am I to suppose that every other human being ought to think, act and react just as I do? Maybe we're all very much alike in a great many respects but, as individuals, we're different too."

At that juncture I was in Akron on a trip, and I got a very severe business setback. I was walking along in the corridor of the hotel, wondering how God could be so mean. After all the good I had done Him—why, I had worked here with drunks 6 months and nothing had happened—and now here was a situation that was going to set me up in business and I had been thrown out of it by dishonest people. Then I began to think, "That spiritual experience—was that real?" I began to have doubts. Then I suddenly realized that I might get drunk. But I also realized that those other times when I had had self-pity, those other times when I had had resentment and intolerance, those other times when there was that feeling of insecurity, that worry as to where the next meal would come from; yes, to talk with another alcoholic even though I failed with him, was better than to do nothing. But notice how my motivation was shifting all this time. No longer was I preaching from any moral hilltop or from the vantage point of a wonderful spiritual experience. No, this time I was looking for another alcoholic, because I felt that I needed him twice as much as he needed me. And that's when I came across Dr. "Bob" S. out in Akron. That was just 9 years ago this summer.

And Bob S. recovered. Then we two frantically set to work on alcoholics in Akron. Well, again came this tendency to preach, again this feeling that it has to be done in some particular way, again discouragement. So our progress was very slow. But little by little we were forced to analyze our experiences and say, "This approach didn't work very well with that fellow. Why not? Let's try to put ourselves in his shoes and stop this preaching. See how we might be approached if we were he." That began to lead us to the idea that the A.A. should be no set of fixed ideas, but should be a growing thing, growing out of experience. After a while, we began to reflect: "This wonderful blessing that has come to us, from what does it get its origin?" It was a spiritual awakening growing out of painful adversity. So then we began to look the harder for our mistakes, to correct them, to capitalize upon our errors. And little by little we began to grow so that there were 5 of us at the end of that first year; at the end of the second year, 15; at the end of the third year, 40; at the end of the fourth year, 100.

During those first 4 years most of us had another bad form of intolerance. As we commenced to have a little success, I am afraid our pride got the better of us and it was our tendency to forget about our friends. We were very likely to say, "Well, those doctors didn't do anything for us, and as for these sky pilots, well, they just don't know the score." And we became snobbish and patronizing.

Then we read a book by Dr. Carrel. From that book came an argument which is now a part of our system. (How much we may agree with the book in general, I don't know, but in this respect the A.A.'s think he had something.) Dr. Carrel wrote, in effect: The world is full of analysts. We have tons of ore in the mines and there are all kinds of building material above ground. Here is a man specializing in this, there another man specializing in that, and another one in something else. The modern world is full of wonderful analysts and diggers, but there are very few who deliberately synthesize, who bring together different materials, who assemble new things. We are much too shy on synthetic thinking—the kind of thinking that's willing to reach out now here and now there to see if something new cannot be evolved.

On reading that book some of us realized that that was just what we had been groping toward. We had been trying to build out of our own experiences. At this point we thought, "Let's reach into other people's experiences. Let's go back to our friends the doctors, let's go back to our friends the preachers, the social workers, all those who have been concerned with us, and again review what they have got above ground and bring that into the synthesis. And let us, where we can, bring them in where they will fit." So our process of trial and error began and, at the end of 4 years, the material was cast in the form of a book known as *Alcoholics Anonymous*. And then our friends of the press came in and they began to say nice things about us. That was not too hard for them to do because by that time we had gotten hold of the idea of not fighting anything or anyone. We began to say, "Our only motive as an organization is to help the other alcoholic. And to help him we've got to reach him. Therefore, we can't collide with his prejudices. So we aren't going to get mixed up with controversial questions, no matter what we, as individuals, think of them. We can't get concerned with

prohibition, or whether to drink or not to drink. We can't get concerned with doctrine and dogma in a religious sense. We can't get into politics, because that will arouse prejudice which might keep away alcoholics who will go off and die when they might have recovered."

We began, then, to have a good press, because after all we were just a lot of very sick people trying to help those who wanted to be helped. And I am very happy to say that in all the years since, not a syllable of ridicule, or criticism, has ever been printed about us. For this we are very grateful.

That experience led us to examine some of the obscure phrases that we sometimes see in our Bibles. For a great many of us have taken to reading the Bible. It could not have been presented at first, but sooner or later in his second, third, or fourth year, the A.A. will be found reading his Bible quite as often—or more—as he will a standard psychological work. And you know, there we found a phrase which began to stick in the minds of some of us. It was this: "Resist not evil." Well, after all, what is one going to think? In the modern world, where everybody is fighting, here came someone saying, "Resist not evil." What did that mean? Did it mean anything? Was there anything in that phrase for the A.A.'s?

Well we began to have some cases on which we could try out that principle. I remember one case out of which some will get a kick, and I imagine some others here may be a little shocked, but I think there is a lesson in it, at least there was for us, a lesson in tolerance. One time, after A.A. had been going on for 3 or 4 years, an alcoholic was brought into our house over in Brooklyn where we were holding a meeting. He is the type that some of us now call the block-buster variety. He often tells the story himself. His name is Jimmy. Well, Jimmy came in and he was a man who had some very, very fixed points of view. As a class, we alcoholics are the worst possible people in that respect. I had many, many fixed points of view myself, but Jimmy eclipsed us all. Jimmy came into our little group—I guess there were then 30 or 40 of us meeting—and said, "I think you've got a pretty good idea here. This idea of straightening things out with other people is fine. Going over your own defects is all right. Working with other drunks, that's swell. But I don't like this God business." He got very emphatic about it and we thought that he would quiet down or else he would get drunk. He did neither. Time went on and Jimmy did not quiet down; he began to tell the other people in the group, "You don't need this God business. Look, I'm staying sober." Finally, he got up in the meeting at our house, the first time he was invited to speak—he had then been around for a couple of months—and he went through his usual song and dance of the desirability of being honest, straightening things out with other people, etc. Then he said, "Damn this God business." At that, people began to wince. I was deeply shocked, and we had a hurried meeting of the "elders" over in the corner. We said, "This fellow has got to be suppressed. We can't have anyone ridiculing the very idea by which we live."

We got hold of Jimmy and said, "Listen, you've just got to stop this anti-God talk if you're going to be around this section." Jimmy was cocky and he said, "Is that so? Isn't it a fact that you folks have been trying to write a book called *Alcoholics Anonymous*, and haven't you got a typewritten introduction

in that book, lying over there on that shelf, and didn't we read it here about a month ago and agree to it?" And Jimmy went over and took down the introduction to *Alcoholics Anonymous* and read out of it: "The only requirement for membership in Alcoholics Anonymous is an honest desire to get over drinking." Jimmy said, "Do you mean it, or don't you?" He rather had us there. He said, "I've been honest. Didn't I get my wife back? Ain't I paying my bills? And I'm helping other drunks every day." There was nothing we could say. Then we began secretly to hope. Our intolerance caused us to hope that he would get drunk. Well, he confounded us; he did not get drunk, and louder and louder did he get with his anti-God talk. Then we used to console ourselves and say, "Well, after all, this is a very good practice in tolerance for us, trying to accommodate ourselves to Jimmy." But we never did really get accommodated.

One day Jimmy got a job that took him out on the road, out from under the old A.A. tent, you might say. And somewhere out on the road his purely psychological system of staying dry broke wide open, and sure enough he got drunk. In those days, when an alcoholic got drunk, all the brethren would come running, because we were still very afraid for ourselves and no one knew who might be next. So there was great concern about the brother who got drunk. But in Jimmy's case, there was no concern at all. He lay in a little hotel over in Providence and he began to call up long distance. He wanted money, he wanted this, and he wanted that. After a while, Jimmy hitchhiked back to New York. He put up at the house of a friend of mine, where I was staying, and I came in late that night. The next morning, Jimmy came walking downstairs where my friend and I were consuming our morning gallon of coffee. Jimmy looked at us and said, "Oh, have you people had any meditation or prayer this morning?" We thought he was being very sarcastic. But no, he meant it. We could not get very much out of Jimmy about his experience, but it appeared that over in that little second-rate hotel he had nearly died from the worst seizure he had ever had, and something in him had given way. I think it is just what gave way in me. It was his prideful obstinacy. He had thought to himself, "Maybe these fellows have got something with their God-business." His hand reached out, in the darkness, and touched something on his bureau. It was a Gideon Bible. Jimmy picked it up and he read from it. I do not know just what he read, and I have always had a queer reluctance to ask him. But Jimmy has not had a drink to this day, and that was about 5 years ago.

But there were other fruits of what little tolerance and understanding we did have. Not long ago I was in Philadelphia where we have a large and strong group. I was asked to speak, and the man who asked me was Jimmy, who was chairman of the meeting. About 400 people were there. I told this story about him and added: "Supposing that we had cast Jimmy out in the dark, supposing that our intolerance of his point of view had turned him away. Not only would Jimmy be dead, but how many of us would be together here tonight so happily secure?" So we in A.A. find that we have to carry tolerance of other people's viewpoints to really very great lengths. As someone well put it, "Honesty gets us sober but tolerance keeps us sober."

I would like to tell, in conclusion, one story about a man in a little southern

community. You know, we used to think that perhaps A.A. was just for the big places; that in a small town the social ostracism of the alcoholics would be so great that they would be reluctant to get together as a group; that there would be so much unkind gossip and talk that we sensitive folk just could not be brought together.

One day our central office in New York received a little letter, and it came from a narcotic addict who was just leaving the Government hospital down in Lexington. Speaking of intolerance, it is a strange fact that we alcoholics are very, very intolerant of people who take "dope," and it is just as strange that they are very intolerant of us. I remember meeting one, one day, in the corridor of a hospital. I thought he was an alcoholic, so I stopped the man and asked him for a match. He drew himself up with great hauteur and said, "Get away from me, you damned alcoholic." At any rate, here was a letter from a narcotic addict who explained that once upon a time he had been an alcoholic, but for 12 years he had been a drug addict. He had got hold of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* and thought the spirit of that book had got hold of him, and he wanted to go back to his own little southern town, which was Shelby, North Carolina, and start an A.A. group. We were very skeptical of the offer. The very idea of a narcotic addict starting an A.A. group, even if he had once been an alcoholic! And here he was going to try to start it in a little southern town in the midst of all this local pride and gossip.

We began to get letters from him and apparently he was doing all right. He was a medical doctor, by the way, and he told us modestly, as time went on, about getting a small crowd of alcoholics together and having his trials and tribulations. Mind you, we had never seen him all this time; he had just been writing. He said that his practice had come back somewhat. And so 3 years passed. We had a little pin on a map showing that there was an Alcoholics Anonymous group at Shelby, North Carolina. It happened that I was taking a trip south to visit one of our southern groups. By this time the movement had grown and I had gotten to be a kind of big shot, so I thought, and I wondered, "Should I stop off at Shelby? You know, after all, that's kind of a small group." It is a great thing that I did stop off at Shelby, as you will soon see.

Down the station platform came a man, followed by two others. The two in back of him were alcoholics, all right, but one looked a little bit different. I saw, as he drew near, that his lips were badly mangled, and I realized that this was the drug addict, Dr. M. In the agony of his hang-overs he had chewed his lips to pieces. Yes, it was our man, and he proved to be a wonderful person. He was really modest, and that is something you seldom see in an ex-alcoholic. He introduced me to the others, and we got into his car and went over to the town of Shelby. I soon found myself sitting at a table in one of those delightful southern ancestral homes. Here were the man's mother—and his wife. They had been married about 2 years and there was a new baby. The practice had begun to come back. Still, there was very little shop talk at that meal; and there is no such thing as an A.A. meal without shop talk. I said, "Indeed, this fellow is a very modest man, I never saw an alcoholic like him." He spoke very little of his accomplishments for the group. And then came the meeting that night. Here, next to the barber shop in the hotel, on the most prominent corner of Shelby,

was the A.A. meeting room, with "A.A." looming big up over the door. I thought, "Well, this chap must be some persuader."

I went inside, and there were 40 alcoholics and their wives and friends. We had our meeting, I talked too much as I always do, and the meeting was over. I began to reflect that this was the largest Alcoholics Anonymous group in all America in proportion to the size of the town. What a wonderful accomplishment! The next morning, my telephone rang in the hotel. A man was downstairs and he said, "I'd like to come up. There are some things you ought to know about Dr. M. who got the A.A. group together in this town."

Up came this individual, and said, "You know, I, too, was once an alcoholic. Out for 22 years I've been on dope. I used to meet our friend Dr. M. over in Lexington, and when he got out of there and came back here, I heard he'd beaten the dope game. So when I left, I started for Shelby, but on my way I got back on morphine again. He took me into his home and took me off it. Yes, I used to be a respectable citizen of this state, I helped organize a lot of banks here, but I've heard from my family only second-hand for many years. It's my guess you don't know what this southern pride is, and you haven't any idea what this man faced when he came back to this little town to face the music. People wouldn't speak to him for months. They'd say, 'Why, this fellow, the son of our leading doctor, goes away, studies medicine, comes back, and he's a drunk, and after a while, he's on the dope.' The townspeople wouldn't have much to do with him when he first came, and I'm ashamed to say that the local drunks wouldn't either, because they said, 'We ain't going to be sobered up by a dope addict.' But you see, Dr. M. himself had once been an alcoholic, so that he could get that indispensable bond of identification across. Little by little, alcoholics began to rally around him."

My visitor continued, "Well, that was the beginning. Intolerance, misunderstanding, gossip, scandal, failure, defeat, all those things faced our friend when he came into this town. And that was 3 years ago. Well, Bill, you've seen his mother, you've seen his wife, you've seen his baby, you've seen the group. But he hasn't told you that he now has the largest medical practice in this whole town, if not in the county. And he hasn't told you that he has been made head of our local hospital. And I know you don't know this—every year in this town the citizens have a great meeting at which they cast a ballot, and last spring, at the annual casting of the ballot, the people of this town almost unanimously declared by their ballot that Dr. M. had been the town's most useful citizen during the 12 months gone by." So I thought to myself, "So you were the big shot who planned to go straight past Shelby." I looked at my visitor and said, "Indeed, 'What hath God wrought!'"

DISCUSSION

Posts: Mr. W., is it possible for someone who hasn't been drunk, or ever been an alcoholic, to do what an alcoholic has done? Have you found any possibility that laymen or preachers could begin to do such work? Is there anything in your experience that might lead to that possibility?

Lecturer: Yes, there is a great deal in our experience which leads to the idea that our

friends of the nonalcoholic world can participate. While it's true that the core of our process is the transmission of these things from one alcoholic to another, it is a fact that very often a minister or a doctor can lay the groundwork for our approach. Then, too, there is a class of people that we alcoholics flatter by calling them "dry" alcoholics. In other words, they're neurotics of our description who don't drink, and we recognize them as more or less kindred spirits; sometimes they approach our group and are well received. On the other hand, sometimes people who, from their life experience, just couldn't get the pitch or couldn't make the identification would be regarded by some of the groups as complete outsiders. You know, one of our other faults is that of snob-bishness. We A.A.'s have become extremely snobbish, strange as that may be. But it is true that this thing is a synthesis and we draw upon the resources of both medicine and religion. Of course, the doctor helps us on the physical side of the treatment. He can often prepare the groundwork with the potential alcoholic by pointing out that he has the symptoms of a well-nigh fatal malady. The preacher, or the friend, would do well to emphasize the idea of sickness rather than of immorality. The alcoholic knows he's a louse in most cases, even though he won't admit it, and to be told so once more by someone who never took a glass of beer seems to annoy him greatly. That is not because the other fellow is wrong; we're wrong, but we're just built that way and it's a matter of taking things as they are.

Stoneburner: What can ministers do to cooperate with A.A.?

Lecturer: Of course the approach to the alcoholic is everything. I think the preacher could do well if he does as we do. First, find out all you can about the case, how the man reacts, whether he wants to get over his drinking or not. You see, it is very difficult to make any impressions upon a man who still wants to drink. At some point in their drinking career, most alcoholics get punished enough so that they want to stop, but then it's far too late to do it alone. Sometimes, if the alcoholic can be impressed with the fact that he is a sick man, or a potentially sick man, then, in effect, you raise the bottom up to him instead of allowing him to drop down those extra hard years to reach it. I don't know any substitute for sympathy and understanding, as much as the outsider can have. No preaching, no moralizing, but the emphasis on the idea that the alcoholic is a sick man.

In other words, the minister might first say to the alcoholic, "Well, all my life I've misunderstood you people, I've taken you people to be immoral by choice and perverse and weak, but now I realize that even if there have been such factors, they really no longer count, now you're a sick man." You might win the patient by not placing yourself up on a hilltop and looking down on him, but by getting down to some level of understanding that he gets, or partially gets. Then, if you can present this thing as a fatal and a progressive malady, and you can present our group as a group of people who are not seeking to do anything against his will—we merely want to help if he wants to be helped—then sometimes you've laid the groundwork.

I think the clergyman can often do a great deal with the family. You see, we alcoholics are prone to talk too much about ourselves without sufficiently considering the collateral effects. For example, any family, wife and children, who have had to live with an alcoholic 10 or 15 years, are bound to be rather neurotic and distorted themselves. They just can't help it. After all, when you expect the old gent to come home on a shutter every night, it's wearing. Children get a very distorted point of view; so does the wife. Well, if they constantly hear it emphasized that this fellow is a terrible sinner, that he's a rotter, that he's in disgrace, and all that sort of thing, you're not improving the condition of the family at all because, as they become persuaded of it, they get highly intolerant of the alcoholic and that merely generates more intolerance in him. Therefore, the gulf which must be bridged is widened, and that is why

normalizing pushes people, who might have something to offer, further away from the alcoholic. You may say that it shouldn't be so, but it's one of those things that is so.

Robinson: Would local A.A. groups be interested in preventing the development of alcoholics by giving cooperation to local option movements or other programs to that end?

Lecturer: I don't think so. That may be a very hard thing to explain. I'm sure that many people who are in the reform movement are very, very much disappointed in A.A.'s because they don't seem to want to cooperate. Now I make haste to say right away that on this question of reform, this question of prohibition or moderation or what have you, there are just as many points of view among the A.A.'s and their families as there are among the next thousand people who walk by this place. Therefore, no A.A. group can very well say, "We have a particular point of view about prohibition, or this or that degree of prohibition, or about any educational program that involves controversial issues." You see we A.A.'s are of particular and unique use to other alcoholics, therefore we have to be very careful about anything that is going to get between us and them. In other words, we can't do anything that's going to arouse prejudice. For example, if I were to make the statement here that I believe in prohibition, or that I don't believe in prohibition, and either of those points of view was quoted publicly, I would inevitably arouse prejudice. If I said, "Well I don't believe in prohibition and that's my personal view," then a great many good people who do believe in prohibition would get annoyed; they might go out and say to the alcoholic's wife, "Well, I don't like that crowd of A.A.'s because they don't believe in prohibition and look what liquor has done to your husband." So she doesn't suggest A.A. to her husband and he eventually dies because we have been foolish enough to arouse prejudice in somebody's mind.

Likewise, if we said, "Well, we believe in prohibition," and that were quoted, every alcoholic, almost without exception, reading that in the newspapers, would say, "Why, that's a bunch of reformers! and none of that for me." He shouldn't react that way, but he does. Since ours is a life and death job, you can understand why, as a group, we are very careful not to express any opinions on controversial questions. As a group we have no interest in any kind of controversy regardless of the merit of either side, because if we show such an interest, as a group, then we cut down our own peculiar usefulness.

It isn't that there aren't bonds of sympathy between us and a great many points of view. It isn't that individuals among us don't have points of view. But I wouldn't for the world, in a place like this, express my personal views about any controversial question lest my opinion be imputed publicly to the group, to A.A. Then we would be thrown into a controversy that could only prejudice our efforts and not help anybody very much. It isn't lack of understanding or lack of sympathy; it's a matter of policy about which we have to be unusually careful.

Question: How many drug addicts are there in the A.A. and in the organization similar to A.A. which operates among drug addicts?

Lecturer: We have quite a number of drug addicts who were once alcoholics. So far, I don't know of any case of pure drug addiction that we have been able to approach. In other words, we can no more approach a simon-pure addict than the outsider can usually approach us. We are in exactly the same position with them that the doctor and the clergyman have been in in respect to the alcoholic. We just don't talk that fellow's language. He always looks at us and says, "Well, these alcoholics are the scum of the earth and besides, what do they know about addiction?" Now, however, since we have a good number of addicts who were once alcoholics, those addicts in their turn are

making an effort, here and there, to transfer the thing over to the straight addict. In that way we hope the bridge is going to be crossed. There may be a case here and there that has been helped. But in all, I suppose, there may be around 50 cases of real morphine addiction in former alcoholics who have been helped by A.A. Of course we have a great many barbitol users, but we don't consider those people particularly difficult if they really want to do something about it; and particularly if it's associated with liquor. They seem to get out of it after a while. But where you have morphine, or some of those derivatives, then it gets very tough. Then you have to have a "dope" to talk to a "dope," and I hope that we can find, some day, a bridge to the addict.

Rogers: How many members do you have in A.A.? How many A.A. groups are there?

Lecturer: I might have made that point, although I supposed that the A.A.'s here would have advertised it from the housetops. We have, I think, about 15,000 members, and A.A. groups are in about 367 places. A.A. is showing a capacity to spread by way of literature and correspondence even outside of the United States. We have a very successful group now in Honolulu, and until recently they had had no contacts at all with us except by mail.

Question: If an alcoholic comes to an A.A. meeting under the influence of alcohol, how do you treat him or handle him during the meeting itself?

Lecturer: Groups will usually run amuck on that sort of question. At first we are likely to say that we're going to be supermen and save every drunk in town. The fact is that a great many of them just don't want to stop. They come, but they interfere very greatly with the meeting. Then, being still rather intolerant, the group will swing way over in the other direction and say, "No drunks around these meetings." We get forcible with them and put them out of the meeting, saying, "You're welcome here if you're sober." But the general rule in most places is that if a person comes for the first or second time and can sit quietly in the meeting, without creating an uproar, nobody bothers him. On the other hand, if he's a chronic "slipper" and interferes with the meetings, we lead him out gently, or maybe not so gently, on the theory that one man cannot be permitted to hold up the recovery of others. The theory is "the greatest good for the greatest number."