

**THE FIRST "A.A."  
PAMPHLET**

**AS DERIVED FROM THE  
SERIES**

**OF ARTICLES FROM THE  
HOUSTON PRESS**

**BY**

**LARRY J.**

**(April 1940)**

*[Larry J. came to Houston from Cleveland with only a Big Book and a Spiritual Experience resulting from having taken the Steps while hospitalized. His Sponsors were Dr. Bob & Clarence S. He had not attended an A.A. meeting before coming to Houston. Thanks to Barefoot Bill for this.]*

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS is an informal society of ex-alcoholics who aim to help fellow problem drinkers recover their health.

Rapidly growing, now numbering about 8000, our Fellowship is spreading throughout the

country. The first member recovered seven years ago. Strong chapters, over one hundred alcoholic men and women each, are to be found in Cleveland, Ohio--Akron, Ohio--New York City. Vigorous beginnings have been made in Los Angeles. Baltimore, Milwaukee, Kansas City, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington D. C., St. Louis, and Houston, Texas.

We of A.A. believe that two-thirds of our number have already laid the foundation for permanent recovery. More than half of us have had no relapse at all despite the fact we have often been pronounced incurable.

This approach to alcoholism is squarely based on our own drinking experience, what we have learned from medicine and psychiatry, and upon certain spiritual principles common to all creeds. We think each man's religious views, if he has any, are his own affair. No member is obliged to conform to anything whatever except to admit that he has the alcoholic illness and that he honestly wishes to be rid of it.

While every shade of opinion is expressed among us we take no position as a group, upon controversial questions. We are only trying to aid the sick men and distracted families who want to be at peace. We have found that genuine tolerance of others, coupled with a friendly desire to be of service is most essential to our recovery. There are no dues or fees; our alcoholic work is an avocation.

The Alcoholic Foundation of New York is our national headquarters. Your inquiries will be answered if addressed to Post Office Box 658, Church Street Annex, New York City.

The Fellowship publishes a book called "Alcoholics Anonymous" setting forth our

experience and methods at length. An excellent review of the volume by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick appears on page 27 of this booklet. Directions for obtaining the book and a detailed description of the Alcoholic Foundation will also be found there.

On page 32 physicians will find an excellent medical paper describing our approach. This paper appeared last year in *The Journal Lancet*

(Minneapolis) and was written by Dr. W. D. Silkworth, Chief Physician at the Charles B. Towns Hospital, New York, where our work had its inception five years ago.

We can no better present the spirit and purpose of *Alcoholics Anonymous* than to invite reading of six articles which recently appeared in *The Houston Press*. These pieces were written by one of our newer members, a newspaperman who, scarcely two years ago, found himself in that shadowy No Man's Land which lies just between Here and Here-after. Due to grave alcoholism and pulmonary trouble, two institutions had refused to admit him--too nearly dead, they thought. Then he found the Cleveland A.A. Fellowship. Now he's on a Texas newspaper!

Let Mr. Anonymous of Houston and his editor tell you about it----

## AN EDITORIAL

(As published by the Houston Press)

### **ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**

Age-old, but still alive, is the question as to when the drinking of alcoholic beverages ceases to be a social lubricant, an aid to conviviality, a

solace to the weary and distressed, a tonic to the body and spirit; and when it becomes a devourer of health, success and happiness.

People of independent spirit like to settle the question for themselves.

People inclined to reform their neighbors--and even many otherwise reticent people, because they are honestly and generously concerned over the welfare at least of those near to them--sometimes come to the front with suggestions for the control of drinking, or even for its abolition.

But neither of these attitudes is the concern of Alcoholics Anonymous, a group of several hundred ex-drinkers who have taken to the wagon by a technique of their own, and who are riding there today after most of them had been pronounced hopeless by friends, families, employers, physicians, ministers, psychiatrists, hospitals and sanitariums.

The call themselves true alcoholics--people in whom alcohol becomes a disease for which medical and psychiatric science has not yet found a specific cure.

They say their cure works. They show as witness hundreds of lives restored to health and usefulness, hundreds more among their families relieved of terror and despair, and restored to happiness through the alcoholics' changed lives.

The *Press* thinks their problem and their unusual success with it is so important that it begins today a series of six articles on Alcoholics Anonymous, written by "One of Them," now living in Houston.

The series should provoke thought among the friends and families of "alcoholics," among

physicians and psychiatrists, ministers, social workers, employers, men's and women's clubs--and alcoholics.

The *Press* takes a liberal attitude on drinking. It stood for repeal of prohibition. But even the liquor industry, we believe, would wish success to a technique that promises much to the men and women who cannot handle their drinks.

Inquiry and comment are invited.

## **STORY OF A "WAY OUT" FOR HOPELESS DRINKERS**

### **How an Idea Originated by Ex-Alcoholics Has Helped 2000 to Recover**

*This is a series of six articles about a group of ex-drinkers who have succeeded in a new method of going on the wagon and staying there. One of their first principles is to pass their experience along, to help others similarly afflicted. The Press will be glad to receive comments.---The Editor*

#### **By a Member of Alcoholics Anonymous**

People who get around much need no telling that the problem of those who drink too much for the good of themselves, their work and their families is already serious and becoming worse.

And those who know most about it, either because they themselves are drinkers of this type or because they are close to one who is, realize it in all its lacerating, hopeless details.

It is an age-old problem. Prohibition undoubtedly intensified it. The depression has multiplied its victims.

Today many people are taking the attitude of the English officer in India, who hated his assignment. When reproved for excessive drinking, he lifted his glass and said, "This is the swiftest road out of India."

Now it is true that this part of Texas has escaped the worst part of the depression; but not all of it. And trouble is always easy to find, so that many, like the Englishman, have been indulging in excessive elbow-bending to get away from their worries, their disappointments and their fears in the unstable, war-crazy unsure world of today.

Free to begin drinking, some of them find they are not free to stop.

This series of articles is about them, for them, and for those who are willing to help them.

It is the story of how hundreds of ex-alcoholics, by a method which they themselves devised and perfected, have found the way out of the squirrel cage.

Most of them, after all that medical and psychiatric science, and even formal religion, could do, had been pronounced hopeless.

But if you think they are out to take the glass from the hand of drinkers to whom the diagnosis "alcoholic" does not apply, you are wholly mistaken. As one of them put it, "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 long enough and hard enough to drink like other people."

Thus the problem, as Alcoholics Anonymous sees it, is limited strictly to those who have

become, or are on the road to becoming, drinkers headed straight for destruction, unless help beyond the usual is brought within their reach.

If this series sometimes turns autobiographical, it will be because it is difficult for a man who has been delivered of a ghastly fate to write with the soberness and restraint required by a strictly objective account.

### **Tried Many Cures**

Jails, hospitals, attempts at suicide, psychopathic wards, sanitariums, all sorts of "spiritual" and "faith" cures, even hypnotism---these have all been mine without deliverance; some by choice, some because society's hand was raised against me.

*Society did not know I was sick. I had made my bed and society insisted that I lie in it. But alcoholics are definitely sick, as this series will try to show.*

Nor did tears, pleadings or threats alter my course for long; and in spite of my own utmost determination, I could never find the answer.

I have personally met at least one hundred "cured" alcoholics---"fellow rummies" as they jokingly call each other.

Their stories parallel my own. Most of them are even worse. One man had been in a sanitarium more than one hundred times.

Another came to see me while I was "taking a rest" in a sanitarium---being defogged so I could use again what brains I had. A livid scar around his neck stood out like the welt raised by a whip. His wrists bore similar witness to the realization of the utter helplessness that had driven him to try suicide as his "swiftest road" out

of the India of his perplexities.

I have been in the homes of some ex-alcoholics, Skeptical by nature, an investigator by training, I took no one's unsupported word. But I saw for myself, not only the new bearing of confidence, even of joy, that exuded from the ex-drinker, but also the ordered life of his family and the new hope and happiness in their faces. I heard it in the tone of their voices.

Literally, these things are hard to believe unless you have had both the experience of being damned and then the surprise of being rescued out of "the jaws of hell," as the old-fashioned revivalists used to put it.

### **No Mystery**

Some of the experiences of these "cured" alcoholics will enliven the serious business of these articles, which is to explain how the alcoholic gets that way; why he or she is different from other drinkers who are able to "hold their liquor" all their lives; how the fellowship called Alcoholics Anonymous came into being and spread from one man, who in desperation evolved the idea, to include now nearly five hundred men and women, with centers being established in one section of the country after another; in as much detail as space will permit, just what the technique is, how it works, how the alcoholic may avail himself of it; and how anyone interested may help.

Repeating what the advance notice of the series said: "No medicine. No treatments. No cost. No mystery. No terrible battle of the will. Ministers have preached about it. Physicians and psychiatrists have praised it."

No one has an axe to grind. Members of the

fellowship give of their time---often their money--to help some victim. Why? The series will also explain that.

### **An Inevitable End**

One can get an eye-witness picture of what happens when several score ex-alcoholics get together in a meeting. No more startling, unbelievable contrast could be imagined than a comparison with what they would have looked like had they assembled when each was at the end of his rope.

Physicians, perhaps more than any other group, know the alcoholic and his hitherto almost inevitable end. Here are the words of two of them:

“I personally know 30 of these cases who were the type with whom other methods had failed completely.

“Because of the 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.

“The subject 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.”

The second says:

“Will the movement spread? Will these recoveries be permanent? No one can say. Yet

we at this hospital, from our observation of many cases, are willing to record our present opinion as a strong 'yes' to both questions."

The head of a hospital and sanitarium in a nearby Texas city, who has many alcoholics come to him, now requires all of them to read about the methods of "Alcoholics Anonymous."

There must be fire where there is smoke.

I, for one, know this to be true.

### **SEEMINGLY ALLERGIC TO DRINK:**

## **ALCOHOLIC'S BURDEN**

**Craving, Plus Inability to Heed Warning of  
Own Weakness,**

**Leads Inebriate to Succumb**

***(Second of Six Articles)***

What is an "alcoholic"? How does he differ from other drinkers? An incident to illustrate:

Convinced that I had nothing to sell, puzzled that I did not come as a patient either, the nurse finally ushered me into the office of one of Houston's most eminent physicians. He is prominent also in other activities that often have put him in the spotlight. He is a "big name."

I had come, as an ex-alcoholic, to tell him about Alcoholics Anonymous and to have him introduce me to an alcoholic victim among his patients whom I might help; for I am a stranger in Houston.

### **One Needing Help**

The good doctor, eyebrows bristling, welcomed me with gruff suspicion. No, he had

never heard of Alcoholics Anonymous. But he listened. I felt he was showing more Texas courtesy than interest.

Half way through my recital he broke in: "Humph," he humphed, "I have no patience with these fellows you call 'victims.'" His voice showed it. "Why, I can handle anything. So could they control their drinking if they wanted to."

But he gave me the name of an able man whose excessive indulgence in firewater was endangering the business he had built up, wrecking his health, rendering his family desperate.

"He's just out of a cure," said the doctor. "But he gave them the runaround some way. Hitting it up again. See what you can do with him. Tell him I sent you. His family is crazy. I can do nothing more."

There you have in one situation the two kinds of drinkers--the man who can "handle anything," and the drinker who steps right out of one of the usual "cures" and hoists a few before he even gets home.

But our experience tells us that everybody cannot "handle anything." The alcoholic cannot control his drinking. Sometimes the dividing line over which he has slid is hard to place.

Some people are alcoholics with their first drink. Most of them become such by degrees.

### **"Not an Alcoholic"**

How can a drinker define his position on the

scale? How can the condition known medically as alcoholism be recognized before the desperate stage?

To get drunk once in a while does not necessarily prove one is an alcoholic in the sense in which the word is used here. A man may drink steadily all his life with an occasional roaring bender, and not be thus classified.

Just before writing this article, I lunched by chance with a newspaperman of short acquaintance. This subject came up and I showed him a draft of yesterday's story in this series.

"Humm!" he said. "That hits me. I've been on the wagon for nine months now. I've never heard of Alcoholics Anonymous; but I know it isn't the tenth drink that will get me down, but the first one. But I'm not an alcoholic."

That's what they all say.

Nobody likes to admit that he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows, especially if he imagines (though wrongly) that doing so pegs him as somehow inferior in good taste, self-control, gentlemanliness, or what have you.

"O.K., then," I said. "You're not an alcoholic. However, here's a test I'll bet you're afraid to make.

"You can diagnose yourself, I'll get a bottle. Come to my room this evening and we'll sit around and gas, while you try some controlled drinking. Take several shots and see what happens.

### **The First Drink**

"See if you can stop abruptly and forget

about it. Try it several times. It will not take long to decide if you are honest with yourself, and it may be worth a bad case of jitters to learn the truth."

"Nothing doing," the gentleman of the press replied. He came back with it so quickly that you couldn't doubt he meant it. "Done that too many times already. It's the first drink that sends me 'off to the races.'"

*He's an alcoholic.* Perhaps not for a long time will he touch another drop. Then some fine day when he isn't looking, one of the insanely absurd and inadequate reasons with which the alcoholic deludes himself when he wants a drink, will pop into his head, just when the drinks are handy.

The first glass down, it's the old story again; but this time he's older. The reasons for his former sobriety may be gone. The picture is different. He has shamed himself, damaged his pride and self-confidence. And perhaps he can't snap out of it by himself or with the ordinary kind of help.

With true alcoholics, it is never a question of control or moderation. Their only out is absolute abstinence.

Alcoholics Anonymous might well make the last two words of the preceding paragraph the second meaning of "A.A."

Why is this total aversion necessary for the drinkers and not for others?

Omar Khayyam, you remember, said of the juice of his well beloved grape: "*'Tis a blessing; we should use it, should we not? And if a curse, why then, who put it there?*"

The alcoholic can indulge in no such philosophical fancies, any more than a diabetic can gorge himself on sweets

His body and his mind become sick, with alcohol.

It is as though he is allergic to drink. The allergy theory is admitted by physicians who advance it to be *only a theory*. Nevertheless, it explains many things that otherwise do not make sense.

Three things especially characterize the alcoholic as a different breed of cattle.

The first is the phenomenon of craving. Not merely the thought that a drink would be agreeable, but a definite, undeniable craving.

The second is the appearance of the curious mental phenomenon that, parallel to the victim's sound reasoning which warns him of the folly and danger, there inevitably runs some insanely trivial excuse for taking the first drink. Insanely trivial because, measured against the hell which from experience he knows he's in for, no one in the state of mind called normal and sane would act on it for a minute.

Sound reasoning fails to hold him in check. The insane idea wins out.

### **Unable to Stop**

The third distinguishing characteristic is the fact that the alcoholic, actual or potential, is absolutely unable to stop drinking on the basis of self-knowledge.

This point has been smashed home on many members of Alcoholics Anonymous out of bitter experience.

How many are the dodges they have tried in vain! Here is a partial list: Drinking whiskey only with milk, drinking beer only, limiting the number of drinks, never drinking alone, drinking only at home, never having it in the home, never drinking during business hours, drinking only at parities, switching from Scotch to brandy or rum, drinking only natural wines, agreeing to resign if ever drunk on the job, 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--the list could go on *ad infinitum*.

I can add a favorite of my own. Believing that the evil of drink lies not in its use but in its abuse. I tried asking whatever you may choose to call the higher Power *to teach me control*.

*Well, it seems God didn't build me that way. I'm glad I found out in time.*

Alcoholism is an illness in a class by itself.

People feel sorry for the victim of cancer. No one gets angry about it. But look at the alcoholic's trail of misunderstanding, fierce resentments, financial insecurity, disgusted friends and employers, warped lives of blameless and trusting children, sad wives and parents--and more.

That is why Alcoholics Anonymous wants this message spread broadcast. If you see no need for it now, who knows how soon you may have occasion to remember it? It may not be a bad idea to clip this series and save it against that day.

## **HOW IT STARTED AND GAINED SPEED**

### **Idea to Help Serious Alcoholics Originated**

**In East;**  
**Launched by Man Who Was "Incurable"**  
**(Third of Six Articles)**

"I see he's back again." said the orderly to the nurse as Mr. X for the umpteenth time turned up in the alcoholic division of a hospital in a larger Eastern city.

He was a regular customer. But this time he came to grips with himself on an idea brought by a friend. More ideas came later. He examined and re-examined them. Already he had given himself up to the fate of an incurable alcoholic, in he had nothing to turn to more effective than he had found hitherto.

When hospital care had knocked the booze out of his brain and nerves, he immediately began to put his ideas into practice. They worked. He stayed sober.

"Later," said the head of the hospital, "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 are amazing.

"The unselfishness of these men 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.

**Five Years Old**

Thus was Alcoholics Anonymous born about five years ago, out of one victim's desperation. Growing very slowly at first, actually from man to

man, centers of information about it now are springing up in widely scattered areas throughout the country.

In the doctor's comment you have the principle reason for the idea's thus coming to nation-wide attention.

When a man makes a spectacular come-back--a right-about-face after having made an ass of himself for years--people ask questions. They may be skeptical at first, but secretly they are astonished, and curious.

Furthermore, the man thus set upon his feet cannot help being a kind of missionary. *But a missionary with what a difference! What missionary to the savage was ever a savage?* But the messenger of Alcoholics Anonymous knows from his own checkered experience all the tricks, all the curves in the road, all the answers to the alcoholic's self delusions.

That's the thing that sold me, finally. These "rummies" knew their onions. They weren't mealy mouthed. They didn't lecture. When they talked to me, still unconvinced, their faces, their "lingo," their gestures, their whole bearing, bespoke the onetime experienced toper.

They were offering, not theory but fact. They acted as though they had a sure thing. They merely wanted me to know about it, what it had done for them.

### **Take It of Leave It**

Go back now to four years ago. A man pacing the lobby of a hotel in a strange city, He is a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Something has gone wrong with his business trip. Not only has he failed, but he wonders how

he is going to pay his hotel bill. The deal that fell through has stirred up a bitter feeling in him.

He has only been sober a few months. As he feels the temptation of the inviting bar at the end of the lobby, he realizes his predicament.

Should he join the gay crowd? Find release, scrape an acquaintance, avoid a lonesome weekend?

Here he runs square up against one of the basic rules of the fellowship. When tempted, it says, if possible work with another alcoholic.

With music and gay chatter in his ears, he turns and seeks the lobby church directory. At random he selects the name of a minister and telephones him. His talk leads him to a former able and respected resident who is on the rocks from excessive drinking.

How this man was reclaimed, how these two salvaged two others, how in 18 months the number grew to 10, and how one couple became so interested that they dedicated their home to the work, is an absorbing story related in the book, "Alcoholics Anonymous," published by the fellowship.

Of this, more later; for the book, and the "Alcoholic Foundation," have been other notable steps in making the message available to all.

*The only requirement for membership is the honest willingness to do anything to quit drinking.*

### **No Fees, No Dues**

There are no fees, no dues. You need not buy the book if an alcoholic cured by, and experienced in, the technique of Alcoholics Anonymous will clearly give you an idea.

Buttressing the personal work of one alcoholic with another, informal meetings are arranged in each center as soon as a small group can be formed.

I never saw anything like them. Here centers the social life of the group. Happiness, gaiety, good fellowship abound. After the brief session devoted to the problems of alcoholics, and the words of advice and encouragement and the interchange of experiences, there may be a poker game, or several tables of bridge.

These birds don't turn sissy when they quit drinking. They get back their real vitality. And the majority are clever, able, once successful people. You see many business men, doctors, lawyers, star salesmen, contractors, insurance men, brokers, merchants, as well as the man whose field is more limited.

These gatherings present the vivid contrast of happy faces and the strained, hungry faces of "prospects" hearing about this for the first time.

The members take away with them a glow they never got out of the best bottle they ever tipped. And it's there in the morning--a hangover of relief, freedom, of strength to hit the new day's work and worry right on the button.

The prospects take away at least the first thrill of wonder and of hope. Is it strange that the group grows?

### **Ministers Approve**

Ministers like Dr. Dilworth Lupton, widely known pastor of First Unitarian Church in Cleveland, O., have personally investigated and then devoted a whole sermon to the subject.

Newspapers like *The Houston Press* have

offered space.

Physicians, nurses, psychiatrists, who have had personal experience with alcoholics made well by this method, give it to other patients.

And alcoholics grab off prospects wherever they spy them, sometimes right off the bar. Their telephones, when they ceased to be anonymous, may ring at any hour of the night telling of someone in desperate plight. They go. The movement spreads.

So far, in two weeks I have been in Houston, I have yet to find one person who heard me talk even most casually about this, who hasn't said, either, "Say, that sounds like something"; or, more often, "I know a man who needs it bad. Here's his name."

Alcoholics Anonymous is the most infectious idea I ever caught. I am quite likely to give it to anyone I come in contact with, for I take no precautions.

My own experience well illustrates how the movement spreads.

Before I left Cleveland to come to Houston, for three weeks I had been trying to straighten out a friend who was soused to the gills, chiefly by drinking with him and trying to taper him off, and either walking him home so he wouldn't break his neck, or pouring him into a taxi.

He wound up in a liquor cure institution. I visited him. By that time, Alcoholics Anonymous had got hold of him.

He told me about them. By accident or design--I never knew which--I met two of them at his bedside one morning.

This friend took to this thing and went to town. It had me thinking, because he had been in terrible shape. He wasn't far out of the port of last call.

### **Problem of Control**

It wasn't long afterwards when, "well in the bag," I received a visit at my hotel from an Alcoholics Anonymous. I had never even heard of him.

No soap. No dice. Like the good doctor mentioned at the beginning of this article, I wasn't interested.

My problem was merely one of control. I wasn't an alcoholic (so I thought). How did he get that way--telling me I was?

When the bottle in my room was empty, he suggested that we adjourn to the bar. We did. He drank coffee, bought whisky for me.

Next morning all I could clearly remember was that this perfect stranger spent time and money on me to get me to quit drinking, and I didn't know why. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. So when he telephoned the next evening asking if he could come over, I said, "Yes."

By the time he got there, I was even further "overseas" than at the time of his first visit. He urged patiently that I should go to a hospital, rest up, eat again like a human being, and think the thing out.

The man had inhuman patience. He said he did this because he liked to and because it helped him to stay sober. This was in a cafe.

"Nuts," I said.

But through a zero blizzard that night I finally let him drive me 50 miles to a sanitarium approved by Alcoholics Anonymous, and at 4 a. m., as he left me, after having talked with me for eight hours without once doing the pleading act, he saw me take my last drink.

And I mean last.

For a week, sometimes as many as half a dozen members of Alcoholics Anonymous visited me in the sanitarium every day. I regained my poise. The fourth day I swallowed my pride and admitted that although I might in all other things have equal omnipotence with God Himself, in regard to drink I was licked before I started.

I began practicing the technique immediately. Then occurred the change, to me still amazing.

Now then, when I decided to live in Houston, how could I help spilling some of this stuff down here, where nobody seems to know about it?

Wouldn't I be a heel if I kept such a priceless thing to myself?

Did you ever hear "*Freely ye have received, freely give?*"

## **SPIRITUAL ASPECT MOST IMPORTANT**

**Foundation for New Life Comes With  
Reliance Upon**

**Power Greater Than Human Ken**

***(Forth in Six Articles)***

As readers of these articles by now have

doubtless suspected, the core of the technique by which Alcoholics Anonymous has worked what often seems like a miracle in the lives of men and women, is spiritual.

Not religious, but spiritual.

Not mental, not psychological---though it is all three of these also---but spiritual.

The majority of the hundreds of alcoholics already reclaimed probably could have been classed rightly only as unbelievers and agnostics. Does it seem strange that this attitude proved no bar to their laying hold on the central truth that is demonstrated by this group?

No stranger than the fact that the membership embraces Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, all creeds, denominations and faiths.

### **Universal Truth**

There is no reason why Hindu, the Mohammedan, or the veriest unreclaimed Hottentot could not translate the central truth about this cure for alcoholism into his own faith, his own native customs.

*It is universal because it depends on its effectiveness, and depends absolutely on the recognition of a Power higher than man--the Creative Spirit over all. The name is immaterial.*

It will, however, simplify matters to use the familiar terminology employed in the Christian religion, calling this power "God."

How you picture Him, say Alcoholics Anonymous in all reverence, does not matter. To Smith He may be a patriarch up there somewhere, with a dazzling robe. To Jones, the

agnostic, His form is still a question mark, if indeed He has any form understandable to man. And Brown may almost literally feel the reassuring pressure of His hand as they walk together through the tough spots of the day.

The Creative Spirit is in all things. It is not strange that people should differ in the ways in which they realize this.

But the Power Itself is one and the same thing.

How did these ex-alcoholics get hold of this Power? By a simple act of faith. It's really the way the Good Book tells about.

The alcoholic says in effect:

"I've beat this habit around the bush from hell to breakfast and back again, and I can't whip it. It has me down. I can't beat it alone. *But there is a Power greater than I.* I shall call on it now; and forever more, daily, hourly if necessary, to preserve me from this evil."

If this be said in absolute honesty, and adhered to, the foundation of a new life is laid, this time on rock. No more shifting sand.

Since "faith without works is dead," however, more has to be done. This is only the beginning. And it is in the sequence of other steps in the technique that the alcoholic soon realizes the unique and amazing practical value.

### **Habit-Changing**

The reward seems to go hand in hand with the deed.

Psychologists and psychiatrists will tell you that, to change a person's ingrained habits, one of two things is necessary: either a long and

painful re-education of mind and body, by a supreme and often agonizing effort of the will, so that one set of habits finally is ousted and a new set learned by deliberate and diligent daily practice; or else a change, such as a person experiences in a complete surrender to spiritual principles.

This later is what is meant by a spiritual experience. It reaches the inner man. The old passes away and behold all things are indeed become new.

If it can be achieved, it is the simplest, the easiest, the quickest, the surest way, and the safest from relapse.

William James, the noted psychologist, in his book "Varieties of Religious Experiences," illustrates the myriad paths by which this inner change may be wrought. But surrender to the higher Power, and faith therein, are of the essence of all.

In non-religious terms, the experience is like the realization that sometimes comes to a person who has never appreciated good music or good books, and who all of a sudden "gets" the idea of the pleasure, the value to be found in them. Thenceforth he proceeds with delight to enjoy that in which he formerly had found no charm, no meaning.

Similarly, the alcoholic come to a realization that the Higher Power waits to help: that with God, truly "all things are possible."

As outlined in the book "Alcoholics Anonymous," the steps so far outlined in this article comprise the first three of twelve steps in the entire technique. In the experience of alcoholics who have taken all three, what has

happened?

### **A New World**

“I stood in the sunlight at last. Scales of pride and prejudice fell from my eyes. A new world came into view.”

Again: “After making this final agreement (not just for another resolution) to let God 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.’

“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 God to help me drink alcohol without its hurting me, which is a far different thing than asking Him to help me not drink at all. So here I stand, and it is wonderful.”

An artist: “A 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.

“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’.”

### **We Have to Live It**

I myself, coming down from Cleveland, Ohio,

to Houston on the train, hardly out of my swaddling clothes on this thing, *all of a sudden felt so overwhelmingly illuminated and relieved by the idea that I no longer had to think about "to drink or not to drink," that I dug out my notebook and wrote down, How much of my life this realization turned loose for things of real value!*

As my oldest son wrote me yesterday: "Congratulations upon your discovery that you and alcohol do not agree. Now that you give full recognition to that fact, you cease to be on deceitful terms with yourself and all of you can go in the same direction--which is ahead!"

He hit the bullseye that time.

I'm free now because I'm all in one piece--no longer a "house divided against itself."

But this spiritual life is not a theory. We have to live it.

Alcoholics Anonymous do not think it is enough merely for a man to stay sober.

What of the swath of destruction the alcoholic has cut through the lives of others by his refusal, failure or inability to consider the needs of those who have trusted him and those who are dependent on him?

Remorse won't pay this off. There's some work to be done.

Now that the preliminaries of surrender and of faith are established, the period of practice comes.

Here is where the other nine of the 12 points of the Alcoholics Anonymous code comes into view.

## **TWELVE STAGES TO OVERCOME ALCOHOLISM**

### **Stumbling Blocks Must Be Removed by Patient Effort and**

### **Daily Application of System**

### ***(Fifth of Six Articles)***

If wishes were horses, beggars would ride; and the alcoholics could come into his cure on the gallop.

True enough, the deliverance of the alcoholic already begun with the soul-deep wish to be free of this weight that rides him relentlessly and as odiously as the Old Man of the Sea rode Sindbad the Sailor in the "Arabian Nights."

Then, as explained in the preceding article, has come the recognition of human helplessness and complete reliance on the Supreme Power as the one way out.

But the steps have only turned on the lights of faith and set the stage for action. The leading man must now make his entrance, play his part.

The first word of the first act is "honesty." To be honest, says the dictionary, means to be straightforward in thought and conduct; free from any deception or fraud.

### **How It Works**

*The chapter of the book, "Alcoholics Anonymous," entitled "How It Works," begins: "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 program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves.*

“There are such unfortunates. 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.*”

You will note the cardinal emphasis on this business of being truthful.

If the alcoholic who seeks relief by this technique is too befogged, too jittery, to think honestly it is usually wise, on the advice of a physician, for him first to be given the care that will enable him to think straight, even if it means a period in hospital or sanitarium.

You need your brain to beat alcohol. When the bees are buzzing in it, and pink elephants are beginning to think you might soon have some peanuts for them, it is hard, if not indeed impossible, to think straight. Everybody is out of step but you.

The alcoholic, then, has to be his real self, and have the help of God, to take the next steps on the road to freedom.

While Alcoholics Anonymous suggest a program numbering 12 stages, individuals vary as to the ones they emphasize. Lives are different, hence recoveries differ also.

### **Two General Units**

The remaining nine steps therefore will be treated here as two general units: one, “cleaning house”; and two, “helping others.” Let us examine them.

The alcoholic has been living an undisciplined , self-centered life. Whether he admits it or not, competent outside observers could demonstrate it in two minutes, The history of a leading physician in an eastern city, whose guest I have been, may be extreme in illustrating this, but it is typical.

After having been 35 years on the bottle, he has now been weaned for nearly five years. He is one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous. He told me this story:

“I had developed two dandy phobias that kept me in a spin. I feared that I should not be able to sleep at night unless I went to bed well oiled; and I feared that if I were under the influence during the day, I should not be able to earn enough money to buy enough liquor to get drunk enough to sleep at night so I could work the next day to get more money to buy more liquor so I could go to sleep..... and so on and so on, around the clock.

“So during the day I doped myself with heavy sedatives to hold down the jitters, and at night, having sneaked my liquor in, I drank myself to sleep.

“Where, in 35 years of such a squirrel-cage existence, was there a chance for this doctor to live the generous life---one guided by consideration for others? In the presence of his obsession with alcohol, nothing else counted heavily, no matter how many or how frequent were the isolated acts of kindness and generosity he performed.

He was living for his alcoholic self. All alcoholics, in varying degree, live that way. Hence they have cluttered their lives with wrongs to other people.

*Part of the housecleaning process consists in acknowledging these wrongs; inventorying them; righting them insofar as possible without doing further harm to people; asking God to remove shortcomings; and continuing to take personal inventory day by day, admitting and undoing a committed wrong as soon as discovered.*

These are the most difficult stumbling blocks for many. To get over them, not only is rigid honesty with self and others obviously a prerequisite, but also moral courage of the highest degree.

Yet, at this juncture, the alcoholic is reminded of the saying of the Man of Galilee: "Lo, I am with you always." He does not need to go alone.

One alcoholic, in fear and trembling, set out to square himself with some business acquaintances upon whom he depended for what was left of his livelihood. Like most alcoholics, he thought few people knew the extent of his former dependence on drink, and he feared that he would alienate them by telling them how he failed to measure up to business requirements.

But they knew. What's more, they understood and sympathized with his new position. Sincerity and clean purpose seem irresistible even to the congenital skeptic!

This man returned home elated. He's been going like a house afire ever since.

If you were convinced that such a man's real purpose was to fit himself to be of maximum service to the people about him, and there were no room for suspecting him of hypocrisy or self-deceit, what would be your attitude toward him, Alcoholics Anonymous ask.

Well, that's the way it works!

### **The Final Step**

The final step of cleaning house is the morning preparation for each day.

Now, it is evident that any alcoholic, unless he be in the very throes of death from delirium tremens or some other complication, can live without a drink for 24 hours. Many have repeatedly done so--in jails, in psychopathic wards, in hospitals and sanitariums; or just on plain will power.

If the stake was high enough, they'd do it merely on a bet, sitting on a barrel of their favorite brand with the bung hole open. But without bolstering of some kind they could not add another 24 hours to another indefinitely.

They've tried. They've invariably failed. That's why they are alcoholics.

But when they exchange such enforced and material aids for the spiritual help of that Power-Higher-Than-Themselves, the way one dry 24 hours follows another is simplicity itself.

The alcoholic who is following the procedure here outlined begins his day by making conscious contact with this Power--with God. Some call it prayer. Some call it meditation. Some read the Bible. But *all* of them try honestly to square off the day in the presence of God.

Twenty-four hours to go without a drink. Twenty-four hours to be honest. Twenty-four hours to live like a man. That's all. No worry about the next day, the next year, or the next five, or the next 15.

Shucks, can't he drink if he wants to?

Certainly. But the next 24 hours belong to God. No drinks. And "sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof."

O.K., then. If he does the same every morning and comes through clean, even a fuzz-wit can see that the man will be sober the rest of his life.

And as the blessings of freedom, and growth toward the full rewards of living sanely, pile up, every day becomes easier. Life gains momentum, in the midst of peace.

The alcoholic just entering upon this new life is actually thrilled to discover that, he is to have not one but many true and generous human friends below--*friends who have been through his special kind of hell and have conquered*. They will understand.

That's a bracer with a wallop such as he was never able to get from alcohol.

The twelve steps complete will be found on page 30 of this booklet.

## **HIGH PERCENTAGE OF RECOVERY**

### **Drinker Must Read About Procedure or Talk With One of**

#### **Those Freed From Alcoholism**

#### ***(Last of Six Articles)***

Cases already brought to light by these stories show homes breaking up, divorce or suicide a daily fear or threat, jobs jeopardized, health and sanity slipping, even the bare routine of living relentlessly corroded.

Unseeing, or brazenly ignoring facts; deluding himself, or helplessly letting things drift to the brink, the alcoholic has caused those who

love him to grasp at any straw.

Immediately after the first article appeared, a mother wrote, pleading: "I shall appreciate haste in your reply, with a view that we may head off this coming week-end nightmare."

Another: "S O S. Please telephone me immediately."

"My husband is after liquor like a dope after dope. We are so worried and don't know what to do. Please help me with him," writes another.

Illustrating the helplessness of the alcoholic: "I am very anxious to find some remedy for this sickness of my father, who really wants and tries to quit drinking."

### **A Ray of Hope**

Gratitude: "Your articles in *The Press* have given a ray of hope to many mothers."

Desperation: "Oh, I pray you can help me, for the worry has almost got me. I am a nervous wreck myself. I will hope to hear from you as soon as possible. Please let me hear. It's my last straw."

Hopelessness: "What must I do? I am so sick, he worries me so much. I can hardly hold my head up. I don't know which way to go. I just can't stand it much longer."

The fear that drives the alcoholic's family to secrecy is shown by the envelope, addressed to Mr. Anonymous, Box 2771, Houston, which contained nothing but the address of a man.

Ministers and physicians have written, praising and offering help, and giving the names of alcoholics needing cure.

Besides being a vivid revelation of the prevalence of the malady in Houston, pleas such as the foregoing emphasize the need for careful understanding of just what the method of Alcoholics Anonymous is.

The six articles of this series give a fair outline. The details, of course, have had to be condensed. But those who are interested in putting some alcoholic on the road to recovery should not think that this is a magic formula that can be made to work overnight, or without the co-operation of the alcoholic.

### **Three Alternatives**

The first step, therefore, is to get him interested enough to do one of three things: read this series, read the book or talk to Mr. Anonymous.

If he is too drunk or too jittery to do any of these, on the advice of a physician he may need to be hospitalized until he can talk and think and decide rationally.

Our experience as a group indicates that a brief hospitalization is most desirable in many cases, and really imperative at times. Besides enabling the patient to think clearly, he can be easily approached by our members under favorable conditions. Whenever possible such is the practice in our established centers.

In Houston, there is as yet no group of alcoholics restored to health by this method. The next nearest individual ex-alcoholic is in Galveston, and the next nearest in Marlin. As soon as there are several, it will be possible to bring more of these personal contact and guidance to those seeking relief.

Meanwhile, Mr. Anonymous will do what one

man can to supplement the explanations in these articles, and in the book.

Why is it so helpful to the drinker who has reached the condition treated of here, to talk with a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. *It is because only another alcoholic understands him.*

Lawyers, ministers, business partners and employers, parents and wives, often listen to confidences and fresh resolutions. But the clergy may say, "Your drinking is a sin." The partner or employer: "You'll have to quit this monkey business or get out." Wife or parent: "This drinking is breaking my heart." And everyone, "Why don't you exercise some will power and straighten up and be a man?"

"But," the alcoholic whispers in his heart, "no one but I can know that I must drink to kill the worry and suffering too great to stand."

### **Bunk----All Bunk!**

He presents his excuses to the member of Alcoholics Anonymous who has come to talk. Can't sleep without liquor. Worry. Business troubles. Wife doesn't understand. Debt. Stomach trouble. Overwork. Nerves too high strung. Fatigue. In-law trouble. Loneliness. Grief. Deep, dark, phobic fears.

Then Mr. Anonymous begins to tell the sick one how many more alibis he himself knows.

"Bunk," he says in effect. "I've used them all myself."

And then he tells his own alcoholic history, certainly as bad, perhaps far worse. They match experiences. Before long the prospect has told his new friend things he never even admitted to himself.

A rough and ready psychology it is; but it works in more than half the cases. In the cases where the alcoholic really and honestly wants to get well, the percentage is near 100.

This series will close with a brief but clear digest of the principles and methods of Alcoholics Anonymous; seen through the eyes of eminent religious leaders. First, Dr. Dilworth Lupton, pastor of First Unitarian Church, Cleveland, where there is a group of about 200 ex-alcoholics, said in a recent sermon: "I most humbly confess to having failed completely with alcoholics. Many of my friends in the fields of medicine and psychiatry confess the same feeling of futility.

### **He's Now Convinced**

"Recently, however, my experience with a victim of alcoholism and later with the fellowship that calls itself Alcoholics Anonymous, first aroused my hopes, then my faith; and now I am convinced that these people have found a way out. I have seen it with my own eyes.

"Mr. X, the former alcoholic to whom I just refereed, is a young man with a family. For five years he was rarely sober. He and his wife were headed straight for the divorce court.

"Two years ago he consented to hospitalization. While under treatment he received 18 visits from ex-victims who were members of Alcoholics Anonymous, all of them laymen. Soon he was attending weekly meetings of the Cleveland group. He hasn't had a drink since.

"I have attended two meetings of this group. About 80 were present. They are what the world calls he-men. They come from all walks of life. Catholics, Protestants, Jews, near-

agnostics and near-atheists are among their number.

“I found no excessive piety, no sensationalism, no fanaticism, no aggressive evangelism. They have no desire to make the country dry, or anybody else dry unless he happens to be like them, allergic to alcohol. They seem to have a good sense of humor, a quality sometimes rare in religious circles.

“From what I have read and heard and seen, I am convinced that the success of this movement is due to the practice of certain religious principles that are as tried and true as the Ten Commandments.

### **Spiritual Dependence**

“First: The principle of spiritual dependence.

“My friend, Mr. X, was told by his ex-alcoholic visitors that they had not been able to save themselves, and that only as they reached out for a Power that was greater than themselves was their compulsive neurosis broken. That principle is the core of the movement, just as it is the core of all religion at its best.

“Second: The principle of universality.

“Alcoholics Anonymous is composed of men of various religious faiths, and they intend to keep it so. Indeed, there is no pressure toward joining any religious organization. Furthermore--and this surprises me--each man can conceive of God in whatever concepts please him.

“Such an attitude displays nothing short of genius. These men recognize that behind all forms and expressions of religion itself--the impulse to live nobly and adore the highest.

“Third: The principle of mutual aid. As one of them said, ‘What we have is of no good unless we give it away.’ My friend Mr. X seems typical. He spends every available minute helping alcoholics get on their feet. And he is having a wonderful time. If that isn’t Christianity, in Heaven’s name, what is?

“Fourth: The principle of transformation.

“The ultimate test of religion is the change it makes in the character of the believer. Every man I have met who is connected with Alcoholics Anonymous declares that there has been an astonishing change in attitude and outlook, as well as habits. In the face of collapse and despair they have found a new sense of direction and power.

“It has been moving and convincing.”

### **Our Book of Experience**

Regarding the 400-page book, “Alcoholics Anonymous,” obtainable c.o.d. for \$3.50 by writing to Works Publishing Co., Box 657, Church Street Post Office, New York City, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, internationally noted Baptist leader, said in a published review:

“This extraordinary book deserves the careful attention of anyone interested in the problem of alcoholism. Whether as victims, friends of victims, physicians, clergymen, psychiatrists or social workers there are many such, and this book will give them as no other treatise known to this reviewer will, an inside view of the problem which the alcoholic faces.

“This book represents the pooled experience of 100 men and women who have been victims of alcoholism--many of them declared hopeless by the experts--and who have won their freedom

and recovered their sanity and self-control. Their stories are detailed and circumstantial, packed with human interest.

“The book is not in the least sensational. It is notable for its sober, careful, tolerant, sympathetic treatment of the alcoholic’s problem and of the successful techniques by which its co-authors have won their freedom.

“The core of their whole procedure is religious--the expulsion of the alcoholic’s obsession by a Power-greater-than-himself. Nowhere is the tolerance and open-mindedness of the book more evident than in its treatment of this central matter.

“They are not partisans of any particular form of organized religion, although they strongly recommended that some religious fellowship be found by their participants. By religion they mean an experience which they personally know and which has saved them from their slavery, when psychiatry and medicine failed.

“They agree that each man must have his own way of conceiving God, but of God Himself they are utterly sure, and their stories of victory in consequence are a notable addition to William James’ ‘Varieties of Religious Experience.’

“Throughout the book has the accent of reality and is written with unusual intelligence and skill, humor and modesty mitigating what could easily have been a strident and harrowing tale.”

Our own Bishop of Texas, the Rt. Rev. Clinton S. Quin, heartily endorses Alcoholics Anonymous as follows:

“I do not know that I have had more than my share of alcoholics through my ministry, but I

certainly have had a whole lot. I have said to everyone of them, 'You can be cured if you will do what I tell you to do,' and around the country and particularly in this state, I have the evidence.

"Of course, I was only the instrument--all I did was point the way. This new group of Alcoholics Anonymous are on the right track, and I want to express my appreciation to them for coming to Houston. The Houston Press has providentially done a real service to this city by publicizing this cure.

"Mind you, it doesn't cost anything in dollars and cents--there are no membership dues--no officers. It is all very interesting and very real. Like any other new or old idea, when you yourself have experimented with it and found it to be true, you are enthusiastic about it, and I want to register my deepest interest in what follows."

### **The Alcoholic Foundation**

Alcoholics Anonymous has no formal organization. Correspondence is carried on by the Alcoholic Foundation, Box 658, Church Street Annex Post Office, New York City. The Alcoholic Foundation receives royalties and profits from the sale of the book and occasional gifts.

Of the Alcoholic Foundation and Works Publishing Company the book says in part:

"To receive these inquiries, to administer royalties from this book and such other funds as may come to hand, a Trust has been created known as the Alcoholic Foundation. Three Trustees are members of Alcoholics Anonymous, the other four are well-known business and professional men who have volunteered their services. The Trust states that these four(who are not of Alcoholics Anonymous) or their

successors, shall always constitute a majority of the Board of Trustees.

“We must frankly state, however, that under present conditions, we shall be unable to reply to all inquiries, as our members, in their spare time, may attend to most of the correspondence. Nevertheless we shall strenuously attempt to communicate with those men and women who are able to report that they are staying sober and working with other alcoholics. Once we have such an active nucleus, we can then perhaps refer to them those inquiries which originate in their respective localities. Starting with a small but active centers created in this fashion, we are hopeful that fellowships will spring up and grow very much as they have among us.

“The Alcoholic Foundation is our sole agency of its kind. We have agreed that all business engagements touching on our alcoholic work shall have the approval of its trustees. People who state they represent the Alcoholic Foundation should be asked for credentials and if unsatisfactory, these ought to be checked with the Foundation at once. We welcome inquiry by scientific, medical and religious societies.

“This volume is published by the Works Publishing Company, organized and financed mostly by small subscriptions by our members. This company donates royalty and a profit from each copy of ‘Alcoholics Anonymous’ to the Alcoholic Foundation.”

In closing, three slogans from the book will be understood by those who have closely followed the series. They are: “First things first”; “Live and let live”; and “Easy does it.” They are all old and seem tame; but when applied with this spiritual method of living, they pack dynamite.

And they bring happiness!

## **THE TWELVE STEPS**

The Alcoholic Foundation is already in receipt of many letters from men who report that, though isolated from the various Fellowships, they have been able to recover by rigorously following the steps described in our book "Alcoholics Anonymous."

Even more surprising has been the fact that a number have reported recovery from reading magazine and newspaper articles briefly sketching our approach.

These results gave us the idea which lies behind this booklet. Realizing that some families might not at first buy "Alcoholics Anonymous," we became convinced that a booklet of this nature could set many alcoholics on the Broad Highway to health.

The fifth article of the foregoing series is entitled "12 Stages to Overcome Alcoholism" which, for lack of space, "Mr. Anonymous" was obliged to condense. Since many of us have found close adherence to the "12 Steps" desirable, we think the alcoholic reader would like to know just what these are.

Quoting now from the book-----

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

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and 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."

### **TO THE DOCTOR**

Physicians who know our work first hand almost uniformly endorse it, but the doctor who is not acquainted with us would naturally like to have the opinion of a brother practitioner who has actually seen results.

Here follows a paper written by a physician who, specializing in alcoholism for many years, has watched our growth from the day it began.

### **A NEW APPROACH TO PSYCHOTHERAPY IN**

### **CHRONIC ALCOHOLISM**

**W. D. Silkworth, M.D.+**

**New York, New York**

**Reprinted from The Journal-Lancet,  
Minneapolis**

**July, 1939, Vol. LIX, No. 7, page 312**

The beginning and subsequent development of a new approach to the problem of permanent recovery for the chronic alcoholic has already produced remarkable results and promises much for the future. This statement is based on five years of close observation. As this development is one which has sprung up among alcoholic

patients themselves and has been largely conceived and promoted by them, it is felt that this new treatment can be reported freely and objectively.

The central idea is that of a fellowship of ex-alcoholic men and women banded together for mutual help. Each member feels duty bound to assist alcoholic newcomers to get upon their feet. These in turn work with still others, in an endless chain. Hence there is a large growth possibility. In one locality, for example, the fellowship had but three members in September 1935; eighteen months later the three had succeeded with seven more. These ten have since expanded to over three hundred.\*

It is much more than a sense of duty, however, which provides the requisite driving power and harmony so necessary for success. One powerful factor is that of self-preservation. These ex-alcoholics frequently find that unless they spend time in helping others to health, they cannot stay sober themselves. Strenuous, almost sacrificial work for other sufferers is often imperative in the early days of their recovery. This effort proceeds entirely on a good will basis. It is an avocation. There are no fees or dues of any kind, nor do these people organize in the ordinary sense of the word.

+ Physician in charge, Chas. B. Town's Hospital, 293 Central Park West, New York City.

\* Dr. Silkworth's article was published July, 1939. We have taken the liberty of bringing his figures on our growth up to the present date. (April 1940).

These ex-alcoholic men and women number about five hundred. One group is scattered along the Atlantic seaboard with New York as a center.

Another, and somewhat larger body, is located in the Middle West. Many walks of life are represented, though business and professional types predominate. The unselfishness, the extremes to which these men and women go to help each other, the spirit of democracy, tolerance and sanity which prevails, are astonishing to those who know something of the alcoholic personality. But these observations do not adequately explain why so many gravely involved people are able to remain sober and face life again.

The principal answer is: Each ex-alcoholic has had, and is able to maintain, a vital spiritual or "religious" experience. This so called "experience" is accompanied by marked changes in personality. There is always, in a successful case, a radical change in outlook, attitude and habits of thought, which sometimes occurs with amazing rapidity, and in nearly all cases these changes are evident within a few months often less.

That the chronic alcoholic has sometimes recovered by religious means is a fact centuries old. But these recoveries have been sporadic, insufficient in numbers or impressiveness to make headway with the alcoholic problem as a whole.

The conscious search of these ex-alcoholics for the right answer has enabled them to find an approach which has been effectual in something like half of all cases upon which it has been tried. This is a truly remarkable record when it is remembered that most of them were undoubtedly beyond the reach of other remedial measures.

The essential features of this new approach, without psychological embellishment are:

1. The ex-alcoholics capitalize upon a fact

which they have so well demonstrated, namely: that one alcoholic can secure the confidence of another in a way and to a degree almost impossible at attainment by a non-alcoholic outsider.

2. After having fully identified themselves with their "prospect" by a recital of symptoms, behavior, anecdotes, etc., these men allow the patient to draw their own inference that if he is seriously alcoholic, there may be no hope for him save a spiritual experience. They cite their own cases and quote medical opinion to prove their point. If the patient insists he is not alcoholic to that degree, they recommend he try to stay sober in his own way. Usually, however, the patient agrees at once. If he does not, a few more painful relapses often convince him.

3. Once the patient agrees that he is powerless, he finds himself in a serious dilemma. He sees clearly that he must have a spiritual experience or be destroyed by alcohol.

4. This dilemma brings about a crisis in the patient's life. He finds himself in a situation which, he believes, cannot be untangled by human means. He has been placed in this position by another alcoholic who has recovered through a spiritual experience. This particular ability, which an alcoholic who has recovered exercises upon one who has not recovered, is the main secret of the unprecedented success which these men and women are having. They can penetrate and carry conviction where the physician or clergyman cannot. Under these conditions, the patient turns to religion with an entire willingness and readily accepts, without reservation, a simple religious proposal. He is then able to acquire much more than a set of religious beliefs; he undergoes the profound

mental and emotional change common to religious "experience." (See William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*). Then, too, the patient's hope is renewed and his imagination is fired by the idea of membership in a group of ex-alcoholics where he will be enabled to save lives and homes of those who have suffered as he has suffered.

5. The fellowship is entirely indifferent concerning the individual manner of spiritual approach so long as the patient is willing to turn his life and his problems over to the care and direction of his Creator. The patient may picture the Deity in any way he likes. No effort what ever is made to convert him to some particular faith or creed. Many creeds are represented among the group and the greatest harmony prevails. It is emphasized that the fellowship is non-sectarian and that the patient is entirely free to follow his own inclination. Not a trace of aggressive evangelism is exhibited.

6. If the patient indicates a willingness to go on, a suggestion is made that he do certain things which are obviously good psychology, good morals and good religion, regardless of creed:

a. That he make a moral appraisal of himself, confidentially discuss his findings with a competent person whom he trusts.

b. That he try to adjust bad personal relationships, setting right, so far as possible, such wrongs as he may have done in the past.

c. That he recommit himself daily, or hourly if need be, to God's care and direction, asking for strength.

d. That, if possible, he attend weekly

meetings of the fellowship and actively lend a hand with alcoholic newcomers.

This is the procedure in brief. The manner of presentation may vary considerably, depending upon the individual approached, but the essential ingredients of the process are always much the same. When presented by an ex-alcoholic, the power of this approach is remarkable. For a full appreciation one must have seen the work and must have known these patients before and after the change.

Considering the presence of the religious factor, one might expect to find unhealthy emotionalism and prejudice. This is not the case however; on the contrary, there is an instant readiness to discard old methods for new ones which produce better results. For instance, it was early found that usually the weakest approach to an alcoholic is directly through his family or friends, especially if the patient is drinking heavily at the time. The ex-alcoholic frequently insists, therefore, that a physician first take the patient in hand, placing him in a hospital whenever possible. If proper hospitalization and medical care is not carried out, the patient faces the danger of delirium tremens, "wet brain" or other complications. After a few days' stay, during which time the patient has been thoroughly detoxicated, the physician brings up the question of permanent sobriety and, if the patient is interested, tactfully introduces a member of the ex-alcoholic group. By this time the prospect has self-control, can think straight, and the approach to him is made casually, with no intervention by his family or friends. More than half of this fellowship have been so treated. The group is unanimous in its belief that hospitalization is desirable, even imperative, in most cases.

What has happened to these men and women? For years, physicians have pursued methods which bear some similarity to these outlined above. An effort is made to procure a frank discussion with the patient, leading to self-understanding. It is indicated that he must make the necessary re-adjustment to his environment. His co-operation and confidence must be secured. The objectives are to bring about extraversion and to provide someone to whom the alcoholic can transfer his dilemma.

In a large number of cases, this alcoholic group is now attaining these very objectives because their simple but powerful devices appear to cut deeper than do other methods of treatment for the following reasons:

1. Because of their alcoholic experiences and successful recoveries they secure a high degree of confidence from their prospects.

2. Because of this initial confidence, identical experience, and the fact that the discussion is pitched on moral and religious grounds, the patient tells his story and makes his self-appraisal with extreme thoroughness and honesty. He stops living alone and finds himself within reach of a fellowship with whom he can discuss his problems as they arise.

3. Because of the ex-alcoholic brotherhood, the patient, too, is able to save other alcoholics from destruction. At one and the same time, the patient acquires an ideal, a hobby, a strenuous avocation, and a social life which he enjoys among other ex-alcoholics and their families. These factors make powerfully for his extraversion.

4. Because of objects aplenty in whom to vest his confidence, the patient can turn to

individuals to whom he first gave his confidence, the ex-alcoholic group as a whole, or the Deity. It is paramount to note that the religious factor is all important even from the beginning. Newcomers have been unable to stay sober when they have tried the program minus the Deity.

The mental attitude of these people toward alcohol is interesting. Most of them report that they are seldom tempted to drink. If tempted, their defense against the first drink is emphatic and adequate. To quote from one of their number, once a serious case at this hospital, but who has had no relapse since his "experience" five and one-half years ago: "Soon after I had my experience, I realized I had the answer to my problem. For about three years prior to December 1934 I had been taking two and sometimes three bottles of gin a day. Even in my brief periods of sobriety, my mind was much on liquor, especially if my thoughts turned toward home, where I had bottles hidden on every floor of the house. Soon after leaving the hospital, I commenced to work with other alcoholics. With reference to them, I thought much about alcohol, even to the point of carrying a bottle in my pocket to help them through sever hangovers. But from the moment of my first experience, the thought of taking a drink myself hardly ever occurred. I had the feeling of being in a position of neutrality. I was not fighting to stay on the water wagon. The problem was removed; it simply ceased to exist for me. This new state of mind came about in my case at once and automatically. About six weeks after leaving the hospital my wife asked me to fetch a small utensil which stood on a shelf in our kitchen. As I fumbled for it, my hand grasped a bottle, still partly full. With a start of surprise and gratitude, it flashed upon me that not once during the past

weeks had the thought of liquor being in my home occurred to me. Considering the extent to which alcohol had dominated my thinking, I call this no less than a miracle. During the past four years of sobriety I have seriously considered drinking only a few times. On each occasion, my reaction was one of fear, followed by the reassurance which came with my new found ability to think the matter through, to work with another alcoholic, or to enter upon a brief period of prayer and meditation. I now have a defense against alcoholism which is positive so long as I keep myself spiritually fit and active, which I am only too glad to do."

Another interesting example of reaction to temptation comes from a former patient, now sober four and one-half- years. Like most of these people, he was beyond the reach of psychiatric methods. He relates the following incident:

"Though sober now for several years, I am still bothered by periods of deep depression and resentment. I live on a farm, and weeks sometimes pass in which I have no contact with the ex-alcoholic group. During one of my spells I became violently angry over a trifling domestic matter. I deliberately decided to get drunk, going so far as to stock my guest house with food, thinking to lock myself in when I had returned from town with a case of liquor. I got in my car and started down the drive, still furious. As I reached the gate I stopped the car, suddenly feeling unable to carry out my plan. I said to myself, 'At least I have to be honest with my wife.' I returned to the house and announced I was on my way to town to get drunk. She looked at me calmly, never saying a word. The absurdity of the whole thing burst upon me and I laughed. And so the matter passed. Yes, I now have a

defense that works. Prior to my spiritual experience I would never have reacted that way."

The testimony of the membership as a whole sums up to this: For the most part, these men and women are now indifferent to alcohol, but even when the thought of taking a drink does come, they react sanely and vigorously.

The alcoholic fellowship hopes to extend its work to all parts of the country and to make its methods and answers known to every alcoholic who wishes to recover. As a first step, they have prepared a book called *Alcoholics Anonymous*. A large volume of 400 pages, it sets forth their methods and experience exhaustively, and with much clarity and force. The first half of the book is a text aimed to show an alcoholic the attitude he ought to take and precisely the steps he may follow to effect his own recovery. He then finds full directions for approaching and working with other alcoholics. Two chapters are devoted to family relations and one to employers for the guidance of those who surround the sick man. There is a powerful chapter addressed to the agnostic, as the majority of the present members were of that description. Of particular interest to the physician is the chapter on alcoholism dealing mostly with its mental phenomena, as these men see it.

By contacting personally those who are getting results from the book these ex-alcoholics expect to establish new centers. Experience has shown that as soon as any community contains three or four active members, growth is inevitable, for the good reason that each member feels he must work with other alcoholics or perhaps perish himself.

Will the movement spread? Will many of

these recoveries be permanent? No one can say. Yet, we at this hospital, from our observation of many cases, are willing to record our present opinion as a strong "Yes" to both questions.