

The Jack Alexander Article

How it Sparked the First Great Surge of Interest in AA

Archives, District 17

October 2023

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The Saturday Evening Post Article— Alcoholics Anonymous by Jack Alexander

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (2017). Introduction to The Jack Alexander Article About AA — The Article that Marked a Milestone in the History of AA, <https://www.aa.org/jack-alexander-article-about-aa>

Publication of “Alcoholics Anonymous” by Jack Alexander in *The Saturday Evening Post* issue of March 1, 1941, marked a milestone in the history of this Fellowship.

Although one national article had been published previously, the *Post* report on the handful of men and women who had achieved sobriety through A.A. was largely responsible for the surge of interest that established the Society on a national and international basis.

The *Post* story is a reminder of A.A.’s development in a relatively short span of years. In 1941, approximately 2,000 men and women were living the A.A. program successfully. Today, the number exceeds 2,000,000, and over 61,000 groups meet regularly throughout the United States and Canada and in more than 180 countries.

In 1941 Jack Alexander reported upon the sense of humility and service that distinguished the A.A. program and those who then practiced it. Alcoholics Anonymous has had a tremendous growth since that time. But the same awareness of our need to continue to serve fellow alcoholics in a spirit of helpfulness and humility remains the cornerstone of our Society.

Alexander, J. (March 1, 1941). Alcoholics Anonymous. *The Saturday Evening Post*, <https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2015/12/aa/>

Editor’s note: AA had its beginnings in 1935 when a doctor and a layman, both alcoholics, helped each other recover and then developed, with a third recovering alcoholic, the organization’s guiding principles. By 1941, the group had demonstrated greater success in helping alcoholics than any previous methods and had grown to about 2,000 members. But for most of North America, AA was still unknown. Following the March 1, 1941, publication of an article in *The Saturday Evening Post* describing AA’s extraordinary success, inquiries began to flood in, leaving the small staff of what was then a makeshift headquarters overwhelmed. Alcoholics Anonymous tripled in size

in the next year and continued to grow exponentially. Today, 75 years later, AA claims 2 million members worldwide, 1.2 million of them in the U.S. Following is the original Post article that many credit for AA's success.

Alcoholics Anonymous

Three men sat around the bed of an alcoholic patient in the psychopathic ward of Philadelphia General Hospital one afternoon a few weeks ago. The man in the bed, who was a complete stranger to them, had the drawn and slightly stupid look that inebriates get while being defogged after a bender. The only thing that was noteworthy about the callers, except for the obvious contrast between their well-groomed appearances and that of the Patient, was the fact that each had been through the defogging process many times himself. They were members of Alcoholics Anonymous, a band of ex-problem drinkers who make an avocation of helping other alcoholics to beat the liquor habit.

The man in the bed was a mechanic. His visitors had been educated at Princeton, Yale and Pennsylvania and were, by occupation, a salesman, a lawyer and a publicity man. Less than a year before, one had been in shackles in the same ward. One of his Companions had been what is known among alcoholics as a sanitarium commuter. He had moved from place to place, bedeviling the staffs of the country's leading institutions for the treatment of alcoholics. The other had spent twenty years of life, all outside institution walls, making life miserable for himself, his family and his employers, as well as sundry well-meaning relatives who had had the temerity to intervene.

The air of the ward was thick with the aroma of paraldehyde, an unpleasant cocktail smelling like a mixture of alcohol and ether, which hospitals sometimes use to taper off the paralyzed drinker and soothe his squirming nerves. The visitors seemed oblivious of this and of the depressing atmosphere that clings to even the nicest of psychopathic wards. They smoked and talked with the patient for twenty minutes or so, then left their personal cards and departed. If the man in the bed felt that he would like to see one of them again, they told him, he had only to put in a telephone call.

They made it plain that if he actually wanted to stop drinking, they would leave their work or get up in the middle of the night to hurry to where he was. If he did not choose to call, that would be the end of it. The members of Alcoholics Anonymous do not pursue or coddle a malingering prospect and they know the strange tricks of the alcoholic as a reformed swindler knows the art of bamboozling.

Herein lies much of the unique strength of a movement which, in the past six years, has brought recovery to around 2,000 men and women, a large percentage of whom had been considered medically hopeless. Doctors and clergymen, working separately or

together, have always managed to salvage a few cases. In isolated instances, drinkers have found their own methods of quitting. But the inroads into alcoholism have been negligible and it remains one of the great unsolved public-health enigmas.

By nature touchy and suspicious, the alcoholic likes to be left alone to work out his puzzle, and he has a convenient way of ignoring the tragedy which he inflicts meanwhile upon those who are close to him. He holds desperately to a conviction that, although he has not been able to handle alcohol in the past, he will ultimately succeed in becoming a controlled drinker. One of medicine's queerest animals, he is, as often as not, an acutely intelligent person. He fences with professional men and relatives who attempt to aid him and he gets a perverse satisfaction out of tripping them up in argument.

There is no specious excuse for drinking which the trouble shooters of Alcoholics Anonymous have not heard or used themselves. When one of their prospects hands them a rationalization for getting soused, they match it with half a dozen out of their own experiences. This upsets him a little and he gets defensive. He looks at their neat clothing and smoothly shaved faces and charges them with being goody-goodies who don't know what it is to struggle with drink. They reply by relating their own stories — the double Scotches and brandies before breakfast; the vague feeling of discomfort which precedes a drinking bout; the awakening from a spree without being able to account for the actions of several days and the haunting fear that possibly they had run down someone with their automobiles.

They tell of the eight-ounce bottles of gin hidden behind pictures and in caches from cellar to attic; of spending whole days in motion-picture houses to stave off the temptation to drink; of sneaking out of the office for quickies during the day. They talk of losing jobs and stealing money from their wives' purses; of putting pepper into whisky to give it a tang; of tipping on bitters and sedative tablets, or on mouthwash or hair tonic; of getting into the habit of camping outside the neighborhood tavern ten minutes before opening time. They describe a hand so jittery that it could not lift a pony to the lips without spilling the contents; of drinking liquor from a beer stein because it can be steadied with two hands, although at the risk of chipping a front tooth; of tying an end of a towel about a glass, looping the towel around the back of the neck and drawing the free end with the other hand, pulley fashion, to advance the glass to the mouth; of hands so shaky they feel as if they were about to snap off and fly into space; of sitting on hands for hours to keep them from doing this.

These and other bits of drinking lore usually manage to convince the alcoholic that he is talking to blood brothers. A bridge of confidence is thereby erected, spanning a gap that has baffled the physician, the minister, the priest or the hapless relatives. Over this connection, the troubleshooters convey, bit by bit, the details of a program for living which has worked for them and which, they feel, can work for any other alcoholic. They

concede as out of their orbit only those who are psychotic or who are already suffering from the physical impairment known as wet brain. At the same time they see to it that the prospect gets whatever medical attention is needed.

Many doctors and staffs of institutions throughout the country now suggest Alcoholics Anonymous to their drinking patients. In some towns the courts and probation officers co-operate with the local group. In a few city psychopathic divisions the workers of Alcoholics Anonymous are accorded the same visiting privileges as staff members. Philadelphia General is one of these. Dr. John F. Stouffer, the chief psychiatrist, says: "The alcoholics we get here are mostly those who cannot afford private treatment, and this is by far the greatest thing we have ever been able to offer them. Even among those who occasionally land back in here again we observe a profound change in personality. You would hardly recognize them."

The Illinois Medical Journal, in an editorial last December, went farther than Doctor Stouffer, in stating: "It is indeed a miracle when a person who for years has been more or less constantly under the influence of alcohol and in whom his friends have lost all confidence, will sit up all night with a 'drunk' and at stated intervals administer a small amount of liquor in accordance with a doctor's order without taking a drop himself."

This is a reference to a common aspect of the Arabian Nights' adventures to which Alcoholics Anonymous workers dedicate themselves. Often it involves sitting upon, as well as up with, the intoxicated person, as the impulse to jump out a window seems to be an attractive one to many alcoholics when in their cups. Only an alcoholic can squat on another alcoholic's chest for hours with the proper combination of discipline and sympathy.

During a recent trip around the East and Middle West I met and talked with scores of AAs, as they call themselves, and found them to be unusually calm, tolerant people. Somehow they seemed better integrated than the average group of nonalcoholic individuals. Their transformation from cop fighters, canned-heat drinkers and, in some instances, wife beaters, was startling. On one of the most influential newspapers in the country I found that the city editor, the assistant city editor and a nationally known reporter were AAs, and strong in the confidence of their publisher.

In another city I heard a judge parole a drunken driver to an AA member. The latter, during his drinking days, had smashed several cars and had had his own operator's license suspended. The judge knew him and was glad to trust him. A brilliant executive of an advertising firm disclosed that two years ago he had been panhandling and sleeping in a doorway under an elevated structure. He had a favorite doorway, which he shared with other vagrants, and every few weeks he goes back and pays them a visit just to assure himself he isn't dreaming.

In Akron, as in other manufacturing centers, the groups include a heavy element of manual workers. In the Cleveland Athletic Club I had luncheon with five lawyers, an accountant, an engineer, three salesmen, an insurance man, a buyer, a bartender, a chain-store manager, a manager of an independent store and a manufacturer's representative. They were members of a central committee which coordinates the work of nine neighborhood groups. Cleveland, with more than 450 members, is the biggest of the AA centers. The next largest are located in Chicago, Akron, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Washington and New York. All told, there are groups in about 50 cities and towns.

Self-Insurance Against Demon Rum

In discussing their work, the AAs spoke of their drunk-rescuing as "insurance" for themselves. Experience within the group has shown, they said, that once a recovered drinker slows up in this work he is likely to go back to drinking, himself. There is, they agreed, no such thing as an ex-alcoholic. If one is an alcoholic — that is, a person who is unable to drink normally — one remains an alcoholic until he dies, just as a diabetic remains a diabetic. The best he can hope for is to become an arrested case, with drunk-saving as his insulin. At least, the AAs say so, and medical opinion tends to support them. All but a few said that they had lost all desire for alcohol. Most serve liquor in their homes when friends drop in and they still go to bars with companions who drink. The AAs tinkle on soft drinks and coffee.

One, a sales manager, acts as bartender at his company's annual jamboree in Atlantic City and spends his nights tucking the celebrators into their beds. Only a few of those who recover fail to lose the feeling that at any minute they may thoughtlessly take one drink and skyrocket off on a disastrous binge. An AA who is a clerk in an Eastern city hasn't had a snifter in three and a half years, but says that he still has to walk fast past saloons to circumvent the old impulse; but he is an exception. The only hangover from the wild days that plagues the AA is a recurrent nightmare. In the dream, he finds himself off on a rousing whooper-dooper, frantically trying to conceal his condition from the community. Even this symptom disappears shortly, in most cases. Surprisingly, the rate of employment among these people, who formerly drank themselves out of job after job, is said to be around 90 per cent.

One-hundred-percent effectiveness with non-psychotic drinkers who sincerely want to quit is claimed by the workers of Alcoholics Anonymous. The program will not work, they add, with those who only "want to want to quit," or who want to quit because they are afraid of losing their families or their jobs. The effective desire, they state, must be based upon enlightened self-interest; the applicant must want to get away from liquor to head off incarceration or premature death. He must be fed up with the stark social

loneliness which engulfs the uncontrolled drinker and he must want to put some order into his bungled life.

As it is impossible to disqualify all borderline applicants, the working percentage of recovery falls below the 100 percent mark. According to AA estimation, 50 percent of the alcoholics taken in hand recover almost immediately; 25 percent get well after suffering a relapse or two, and the rest remain doubtful. This rate of success is exceptionally high. Statistics on traditional medical and religious cures are lacking, but it has been informally estimated that they are no more than 2 or 3 percent effective on run-of-the-mine cases.

Although it is too early to state that Alcoholics Anonymous is the definitive answer to alcoholism, its brief record is impressive and it is receiving hopeful support. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., helped defray the expense of getting it started and has gone out of his way to get other prominent men interested.

Rockefeller's gift was a small one, in deference to the insistence of the originators that the movement be kept on a voluntary, nonpaid basis. There are no salaried organizers, no dues, no officers and no central control. Locally, the rents of assembly halls are met by passing the hat at meetings. In small communities no collections are taken, as the gatherings are held in private homes. A small office in downtown New York acts merely as a clearinghouse for information. There is no name on the door and mail is received anonymously through Box 658, Church Street Annex post office. The only income, which is money received from the sale of a book describing the work, is handled by The Alcoholic Foundation, a board composed of three alcoholics and four non-alcoholics.

In Chicago 25 doctors work hand in hand with Alcoholics Anonymous, contributing their services and referring their own alcoholic patients to the group, which now numbers around 200. The same co-operation exists in Cleveland and to a lesser degree in other centers. A physician, Dr. W. D. Silkworth, of New York City, gave the movement its first encouragement. However, many doctors remain skeptical. Dr. Foster Kennedy, an eminent New York neurologist, probably had these in mind when he stated at a meeting a year ago: "The aim of those concerned in this effort against alcoholism is high, their success has been considerable and I believe medical men of good will should aid."

The active help of two medical men of good will, Drs. A. Wiese Hammer and C. Dudley Saul, has assisted greatly in making the Philadelphia unit one of the more effective of the younger groups. The movement there had its beginning in an offhand way in February, 1940, when a businessman who was an AA convert was transferred to Philadelphia from New York. Fearful of backsliding for lack of rescue work, the newcomer rounded up three local bar flies and started to work on them. He got them dry and the quartet began ferreting out other cases. By last December 15, 99 alcoholics had joined up. Of these, 86 were now total abstainers — 39 from one to three months, 17

from three to six months, and 25 from six to ten months. Five who had joined the unit after having belonged in other cities had been nondrinkers from one to three years.

At the other end of the time scale, Akron, which cradled the movement, holds the intramural record for sustained abstinence. According to a recent check-up, two members have been riding the AA wagon for five and a half years, one for five years, three for four and a half years, one for the same period with one skid, three for three and a half years, seven for three years, three for three years with one skid each, one for two and a half years and thirteen for two years. Previously, most of the Akronites and Philadelphians had been unable to stay away from liquor for longer than a few weeks.

In the Middle West the work has been almost exclusively among persons who have not arrived at the institutional stage. The New York group, which has a similar nucleus, makes a sideline specialty of committed cases and has achieved striking results. In the summer of 1939 the group began working on the alcoholics confined in Rockland State Hospital, at Orangeburg, a vast mental sanitarium which gets the hopeless alcoholic backwash of the big population centers. With the encouragement of Dr. R. E. Blaisdell, the medical superintendent, a unit was formed within the walls and meetings were held in the recreation hall. New York AAs went to Orangeburg to give talks and on Sunday evenings the patients were brought in state-owned busses to a clubhouse which the Manhattan group rents on the West Side.

Last July first, eleven months later, records kept at the hospital showed that of 54 patients released to Alcoholics Anonymous, seventeen had had no relapse and 14 others had had only one. Of the rest, nine had gone back to drinking in their home communities, twelve had returned to the hospital and two had not been traced. Doctor Blaisdell has written favorably about the work to the State Department of Mental Hygiene and he praised it officially in his last annual report.

Even better results were obtained in two public institutions in New Jersey, Greystone Park and Overbrook, which attract patients of better economic and social background than Rockland, because of their nearness to prosperous suburban villages. Of seven patients released from the Greystone Park institution in two years, five have abstained for periods of one to two years, according to AA records. Eight of ten released from Overbrook have abstained for about the same length of time. The others have had from one to several relapses.

Why some people become alcoholics is a question on which authorities disagree. Few think that anyone is "born an alcoholic." One may be born, they say, with a hereditary predisposition to alcoholism, just as one may be born with a vulnerability to tuberculosis. The rest seems to depend upon environment and experience, although one theory has it that some people are allergic to alcohol, as hay-fever sufferers are to pollens. Only one note is found to be common to all alcoholics—emotional immaturity. Closely related

to this is an observation that an unusually large number of alcoholics start out in life as an only child, as a youngest child, as the only boy in a family of girls or the only girl in a family of boys. Many have records of childhood precocity and were what are known as spoiled children.

Frequently the situation is complicated by an off-center home atmosphere in which one parent is unduly cruel, the other overindulgent. Any combination of these factors, plus a divorce or two, tends to produce neurotic children who are poorly equipped emotionally to face the ordinary realities of adult life. In seeking escapes, one may immerse himself in his business, working twelve to fifteen hours a day, or in sports or in some artistic sideline. Another finds what he thinks is a pleasant escape in drink. It bolsters his opinion of himself and temporarily wipes away any feeling of social inferiority which he may have. Light drinking leads to heavy drinking. Friends and family are alienated and employers become disgusted. The drinker smolders with resentment and wallows in self-pity. He indulges in childish rationalizations to justify his drinking—he has been working hard and he deserves to relax, his throat hurts from an old tonsillectomy and a drink would ease the pain, he has a headache, his wife does not understand him, his nerves are jumpy, everybody is against him, and so on and on. He unconsciously becomes a chronic excuse maker for himself.

All the time he is drinking he tells himself, and those who butt into his affairs, that he can really become a controlled drinker if he wants to. To demonstrate his strength of will, he goes for weeks without taking a drop. He makes a point of calling at his favorite bar at a certain time each day and ostentatiously sipping milk or a carbonated beverage, not realizing that he is indulging in juvenile exhibitionism. Falsely encouraged, he shifts to a routine of one beer a day, and that is the beginning of the end once more. Beer leads inevitably to more beer and then to hard liquor. Hard liquor leads to another first-rate bender. Oddly, the trigger which sets off the explosion is as apt to be a stroke of business success as it is to be a run of bad luck. An alcoholic can stand neither prosperity nor adversity.

Curing by Catharsis

The victim is puzzled on coming out of the alcoholic fog. Without his being aware of any change, a habit had gradually become an obsession. After a while, he no longer needs his rationalizations to justify the fatal first drink. All he knows is that he feels swamped by uneasiness or elation, and before he realizes what is happening he is standing at a bar with an empty whisky pony in front of him and a stimulating sensation in his throat. By some peculiar quirk of his mind, he has been able to draw a curtain over the memory of the intense pain and remorse caused by preceding stem-winders. After many experiences of this kind, the alcoholic begins to realize that he does not understand himself; he wonders whether his power of will, though strong in other fields, isn't

defenseless against alcohol. He may go on trying to defeat his obsession and wind up in a sanitarium. He may give up the fight as hopeless and try to kill himself. Or he may seek outside help.

If he applies to Alcoholics Anonymous, he is first brought around to admit that alcohol has him whipped and that his life has become unmanageable. Having achieved this state of intellectual humility, he is given a dose of religion in its broadest sense. He is asked to believe in a Power that is greater than himself, or at least to keep an open mind on that subject while he goes on with the rest of the program. Any concept of the higher Power is acceptable. A skeptic or agnostic may choose to think of his Inner Self, the miracle of growth, a tree, man's wonderment at the physical universe, the structure of the atom or mere mathematical infinity. Whatever form is visualized, the neophyte is taught that he must rely upon it and, in his own way, to pray to the Power for strength.

He next makes a sort of moral inventory of himself with the private aid of another person — one of his AA sponsors, a priest, a minister, a psychiatrist, or anyone else he fancies. If it gives him any relief, he may get up at a meeting and recite his misdeeds, but he is not required to do so. He restores what he may have stolen while intoxicated and arranges to pay off old debts and to make good on rubber checks; he makes amends to persons he has abused and, in general, cleans up his past as well as he is able to. It is not uncommon for his sponsors to lend him money to help out in the early stages.

This catharsis is regarded as important because of the compulsion, which a feeling of guilt exerts in the alcoholic obsession. As nothing tends to push an alcoholic toward the bottle more than personal resentments, the pupil also makes out a list of his grudges and resolves not to be stirred by them. At this point he is ready to start working on other active alcoholics. By the process of extroversion, which the work entails, he is enabled to think less of his own troubles.

The more drinkers he succeeds in swinging into Alcoholics Anonymous, the greater his responsibility to the group becomes. He can't get drunk now without injuring the people who have proved themselves his best friends. He is beginning to grow up emotionally and to quit being a leaner. If raised in an orthodox church he usually, but not always, becomes a regular communicant again.

Simultaneously with the making over of the alcoholic goes the process of adjusting his family to his new way of living. The wife or husband of an alcoholic, and the children, too, frequently become neurotics from being exposed to drinking excesses over a period of years. Re-education of the family is an essential part of a follow-up program, which has been devised.

Alcoholics Anonymous, which is a synthesis of old ideas rather than a new discovery, owes its existence to the collaboration of a New York stockbroker and an Akron

physician. Both alcoholics, they met for the first time a little less than six years ago. In 35 years of periodic drinking, Doctor Armstrong, to give the physician a fictitious name, had drunk himself out of most of his practice. Armstrong had tried everything, including the Oxford Group, and had shown no improvement. On Mother's Day, 1935, he staggered home, in typical drunk fashion, lugging an expensive potted plant, which he placed in his wife's lap. Then he went upstairs and passed out.

At that moment, nervously pacing the lobby of an Akron hotel, was the broker from New York, whom we shall arbitrarily call Griffith. Griffith was in a jam. In an attempt to obtain control of a company and rebuild his financial fences, he had come out to Akron and engaged in a fight for proxies. He had lost the fight. His hotel bill was unpaid. He was almost flat broke. Griffith wanted a drink.

During his career in Wall Street, Griffith had turned some sizable deals and had prospered, but, through ill-timed drinking bouts, had lost out on his main chances. Five months before coming to Akron he had gone on the water wagon, through the ministrations of the Oxford Group in New York. Fascinated by the problem of alcoholism, he had many times gone back as a visitor to a Central Park West detoxicating hospital, where he had been a patient, and talked to the inmates. He effected no recoveries, but found that by working on other alcoholics he could stave off his own craving.

A Doctor for a Patient

A stranger in Akron, Griffith knew no alcoholics with whom he could wrestle. A church directory, which hung in the lobby opposite the bar, gave him an idea. He telephoned one of the clergymen listed and through him got in touch with a member of the local Oxford Group. This person was a friend of Doctor Armstrong's and was able to introduce the physician and the broker at dinner. In this manner Doctor Armstrong became Griffith's first real disciple. He was a shaky one, at first. After a few weeks of abstinence, he went East to a medical convention and came home in a liquid state. Griffith, who had stayed in Akron to iron out some legal tangles arising from the proxy battle, talked him back to sobriety. That was on June 10, 1935. The nips the physician took from a bottle proffered by Griffith on that day were the last drinks he ever took.

Griffith's lawsuits dragged on, holding him over in Akron for six months. He moved his baggage to the Armstrong home, and together the pair struggled with other alcoholics. Before Griffith went back to New York, two more Akron converts had been obtained. Meanwhile, both Griffith and Doctor Armstrong had withdrawn from the Oxford Group, because they felt that its aggressive evangelism and some of its other methods were hindrances in working with alcoholics. They put their own technique on a strict take-it-or-leave-it basis and kept it there.

Progress was slow. After Griffith had returned East, Doctor Armstrong and his wife, a Wellesley graduate, converted their home into a free refuge for alcoholics and an experimental laboratory for the study of the guests' behavior. One of the guests, who, unknown to his hosts, was a manic depressive as well as an alcoholic, ran wild one night with a kitchen knife. He was overcome before he had stabbed anyone. After a year and a half, a total of ten persons had responded to the program and were abstaining. What was left of the family savings had gone into the work. The physician's new sobriety caused a revival in his practice, but not enough of one to carry the extra expense. The Armstrongs, nevertheless, carried on, on borrowed money. Griffith, who had a Spartan wife, too, turned his Brooklyn home into a duplicate of the Akron ménage. Mrs. Griffith, a member of an old Brooklyn family, took a job in a department store and in her spare time played nurse to inebriates. The Griffiths also borrowed, and Griffith managed to make odd bits of money around the brokerage houses. By the spring of 1939 the Armstrongs and the Griffiths had between them cozened about one hundred alcoholics into sobriety.

In a book which they published at that time the recovered drinkers described the cure program and related their personal stories. The title was *Alcoholics Anonymous*. It was adopted as a name for the movement itself, which up to then had none. As the book got into circulation, the movement spread rapidly.

Today, Doctor Armstrong is still struggling to patch up his practice. The going is hard. He is in debt because of his contributions to the movement and the time he devotes gratis to alcoholics. Being a pivotal man in the group, he is unable to turn down the requests for help which flood his office.

Griffith is even deeper in the hole. For the past two years he and his wife have had no home in the ordinary sense of the word. In a manner reminiscent of the primitive Christians they have moved about, finding shelter in the homes of AA colleagues and sometimes wearing borrowed clothing.

A Self-Starting Movement

Having got something started, both the prime movers want to retire to the fringe of their movement and spend more time getting back on their feet financially. They feel that the way the thing is set up it is virtually self-operating and self-multiplying. Because of the absence of figureheads and the fact that there is no formal body of belief to promote, they have no fear that Alcoholics Anonymous will degenerate into a cult.

The self-starting nature of the movement is apparent from letters in the files of the New York office. Many persons have written in saying that they stopped drinking as soon as they read the book, and made their homes meeting places for small local chapters. Even a fairly large unit, in Little Rock, got started in this way. An Akron civil engineer

and his wife, in gratitude for his cure four years ago, have been steadily taking alcoholics into their home. Out of thirty-five such wards, thirty-one have recovered.

Twenty pilgrims from Cleveland caught the idea in Akron and returned home to start a group of their own. From Cleveland, by various means, the movement has spread to Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Indianapolis, Atlanta, San Francisco, Evansville and other cities. An alcoholic Cleveland newspaperman with a surgically collapsed lung moved to Houston for his health. He got a job on a Houston paper and through a series of articles which he wrote for it started an AA unit which now has thirty-five members. One Houston member has moved to Miami and is now laboring to snare some of the more eminent winter colony lushes. A Cleveland traveling salesman is responsible for starting small units in many different parts of the country. Fewer than half of the AA members have ever seen Griffith or Doctor Armstrong.

To an outsider who is mystified, as most of us are, by the antics of problem drinking friends, the results which have been achieved are amazing. This is especially true of the more virulent cases, a few of which are herewith sketched under names that are not their own.

Sarah Martin was a product of the F. Scott Fitzgerald era. Born of wealthy parents in a Western city, she went to Eastern boarding schools and “finished” in France. After making her debut, she married. Sarah spent her nights drinking and dancing until daylight. She was known as a girl who could carry a lot of liquor. Her husband had a weak stomach and she became disgusted with him. They were quickly divorced. After her father’s fortune had been erased in 1929, Sarah got a job in New York and supported herself. In 1932, seeking adventure, she went to Paris to live and set up a business of her own, which was successful. She continued to drink heavily and stayed drunk longer than usual. After a spree in 1933 she was informed that she had tried to throw herself out a window. During another bout she did jump, or fall—she doesn’t remember which—out of a first-floor window. She landed face first on the sidewalk and was laid up for six months of bone setting, dental work and plastic surgery.

In 1936 Sarah Martin decided that if she changed her environment by returning to the United States, she would be able to drink normally. This childish faith in geographical change is a classic delusion which all alcoholics get at one time or another. She was drunk all the way home on the boat. New York frightened her and she drank to escape it. Her money ran out and she borrowed from friends. When the friends cut her, she hung around Third Avenue bars cadging drinks from strangers. Up to this point, she had diagnosed her trouble as a nervous breakdown. Not until she had committed herself to several sanitariums did she realize, through reading, that she was an alcoholic. On advice of a staff doctor, she got in touch with an Alcoholics Anonymous group. Today she has another good job and spends many of her nights sitting on hysterical women

drinkers to prevent them from diving out of windows. In her late thirties, Sarah Martin is an attractively serene woman. The Paris surgeons did handsomely by her.

Watkins is a shipping clerk in a factory. Injured in an elevator mishap in 1927, he was furloughed with pay by a company that was thankful that he did not sue for damages. Having nothing to do during a long convalescence, Watkins loafed in speak-easies. Formerly a moderate drinker, he started to go on drunks lasting several months. His furniture went for debt and his wife fled, taking their three children. In eleven years, Watkins was arrested twelve times and served eight workhouse sentences. Once, in an attack of delirium tremens, he circulated a rumor among the prisoners that the county was poisoning the food in order to reduce the workhouse population and save expenses. A mess-hall riot resulted. In another fit of DTs, during which he thought the man in the cell above was trying to pour hot lead on him, Watkins slashed his own wrists and throat with a razor blade. While recuperating in an outside hospital, with eighty-six stitches, he swore never to drink again. He was drunk before the final bandages were removed. Two years ago a former drinking companion got him into Alcoholics Anonymous and he hasn't touched liquor since. His wife and children have returned and the home has new furniture. Back at work, Watkins has paid off the major part of \$2000 in debts and petty alcoholic thefts and has his eye on a new automobile.

At twenty-two, Tracy, a precocious son of well-to-do parents, was credit manager for an investment-banking firm whose name has become a symbol of the money-mad 20's. After the firm's collapse during the stock-market crash, he went into advertising and worked up to a post which paid him \$23,000 a year. On the day his son was born Tracy was fired. Instead of appearing in Boston to close a big advertising contract, he had gone on a spree and had wound up in Chicago, losing out on the contract. Always a heavy drinker, Tracy became a bum. He tumbled on canned heat and hair tonic and begged from cops, who are always easy touches for amounts up to a dime. On one sleety night Tracy sold his shoes to buy a drink, putting on a pair of rubbers he had found in a doorway and stuffing them with paper to keep his feet warm.

The Convivial AAs

He started committing himself to sanitariums, more to get in out of the cold than anything else. In one institution, a physician got him interested in the AA program. As part of it, Tracy, a Catholic, made a general confession and returned to the church, which he had long since abandoned. He skidded back to alcohol a few times, but after a relapse in February, 1939, Tracy took no more drinks. He has since then beat his way up again to \$18,000 a year in advertising.

Victor Hugo would have delighted in Brewster, an adventurer who took life the hard way. Brewster was a lumberjack, cow hand and wartime aviator. During the postwar era he took up flask-toting and was soon doing a Cook's tour of the sanitariums. In one of

them, after hearing about shock cures, he bribed the Negro attendant in the morgue, with gifts of cigarettes, to permit him to drop in each afternoon and meditate over a cadaver. The plan worked well until one day he came upon a dead man who, by a freak of facial contortion, wore what looked like a grin. Brewster met up with the AAs in December, 1938, and after achieving abstinence got a sales job which involved much walking. Meanwhile, he had got cataracts on both eyes. One was removed, giving him distance sight with the aid of thick-lens spectacles. He used the other eye for close-up vision, keeping it dilated with an eye-drop solution in order to avoid being run down in traffic. Then he developed a swollen, or milk, leg. With these disabilities, Brewster tramped the streets for six months before he caught up with his drawing account. Today, at fifty, and still hampered by his physical handicaps, he is making his calls and is earning around \$400 a month.

For the Brewsters, the Martins, the Watkinses, the Tracys and the other reformed alcoholics, congenial company is now available wherever they happen to be. In the larger cities AAs meet one another daily at lunch in favored restaurants. The Cleveland groups give big parties on New Year's and other holidays, at which gallons of coffee and soft drinks are consumed. Chicago holds open house on Friday, Saturday and Sunday—alternately, on the North, West and South Sides—so that no lonesome AA need revert to liquor over the weekend for lack of companionship. Some play cribbage or bridge, the winner of each hand contributing to a kitty for paying off entertainment expenses. The others listen to the radio, dance, eat or just talk. All alcoholics, drunk or sober, like to gab. They are among the most society-loving people in the world, which may help to explain why they got to be alcoholics in the first place.

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The Story Behind the Article

General Service Office (GSO) of Alcoholics Anonymous. (2023).

<https://www.aa.org/the-story-behind-Jack-Alexanders-article>

On March 1, 1941, *The Saturday Evening Post* published "Alcoholics Anonymous: Freed Slaves of Drink, Now They Free Others." The article became a major turning point in the history of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The Journalist Meets Bill W.

The story begins when the owner of *The Saturday Evening Post*, Judge Curtis Bok, learned of A.A. from two friends. He wanted the Post tell the story of the organization. He called upon a well-known journalist of *The Saturday Evening Post*, Jack Alexander, to do so.

A.A. co-founder Bill W., eager to publicize the A.A. message, met with Alexander. He gave Alexander access to records and a tour of significant A.A. sights. He also set up interviews both with A.A. members and with nonalcoholic trustees of the General Service Board.

Correspondence between Jack Alexander and Bill W. shows the excitement about the upcoming article. On January 4, 1941, Alexander wrote to Bill W. and enclosed a manuscript of the article for Bill to read. On January 6, Bill replied, and from his response the eagerness for the article's release is clear. Bill wrote:

I wish I could adequately convey to you the sense of gratitude that every one of us feels towards you and the Saturday Post for what is about to take place. You can not possibly conceive the direct alleviation of so much misery as will be brought to an end through your pen and your good publishers. For many a day you will be the toast of A.A. - in Coca-Cola, of course!"

— BILL W. TO JACK ALEXANDER IN 1941

Response to the Article

Following the release of the article, inquiries began to flood in. The small staff of the "A.A. Headquarters," the precursor to the General Service Office, was busy. On March 12, Ruth Hock, first nonalcoholic secretary of A.A., wrote to Dr. Bob, A.A. co-founder, to

update him on events in New York. She said that the office had become swamped with 918 inquiries in 12 days as a direct response to the article.

The offices of *The Saturday Evening Post* also received a large number of inquiries. A March 26, 1941, bulletin by the Post relays the power behind the article.

Following the publication of ‘Alcoholics Anonymous’ by Jack Alexander, the Post floor received an unusually large mail from readers, much of it asking how contact could be established with groups who are doing this work in various cities. There were several instances of calls on our branch offices for information on local organizations of this unusual group.”

— BULLETIN FROM THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

The Follow-Up Article in 1950

Eight years after the wildly successful 1941 *The Saturday Evening Post* article, Bill W. wrote to Jack Alexander with a request. Bill W. hoped Alexander would write a follow-up article. On June 8, 1949, Bill W. wrote the following:

If you can spare me a little time, I'd like to come down to Philadelphia and see you. Eight years ago the Saturday Evening Post took A.A. out of the pioneering stage and made it a movement. Uncounted thousands owe their great good fortune, yes their very lives, to what the Post did then. We still ship reprints of your article by the carload.

Nowadays A.A. rarely asks for publicity. I suppose we still get it in enormous quantities partly for that reason. Yet the time is here when an exception should be made.

The point of this letter is what I would definitely like to ask you folks a favor. Will you print another piece about us?

The general public has only the vaguest idea what our society really looks like. I think they would be interested in an inside view.

From our standpoint, a vital job has to be done. Now that the recovery formula is above ground and working at a prodigious rate, our main problem is that of maintaining our unity as a movement until every drunk in the world has had a good look at the idea.

So then, if John Q. Public could get an inside view of what our fellowship is really like, and it could become quite clear to him what good A.A.'s do and what they don't do in their relationships with each other and with the outside world, the Saturday Evening Post would

have written an insurance policy on our future, the value of which no men could ever reckon.”

— BILL W. TO JACK ALEXANDER IN 1949

On June 9, Jack Alexander replied that he had always thought about writing a follow-up but had never gotten around to it. He also writes that there is trouble with the idea and says:

There is basic trouble about it, though; I don't see, offhand, where there is enough new material to justify a second look. True, the number of A.A.'s has ballooned enormously, but that in itself is merely statistical. The basic story—the psychology of drinkers, how the A.A.'s work on them, the steps towards arresting the habit—remains unchanged; or so it seems to me.”

— JACK ALEXANDER TO BILL W. IN 1949

On December 13, 1949 Bill W. wrote to Jack Alexander outlining the major turning points in the A.A. movement. This included the decision to leave the Oxford Group and Rockefeller affirming that their work should be self-supporting. He also mentioned the formation of the Alcoholic Foundation and the first two chapters of the Big Book.

For the next few months Bill W. and Jack Alexander corresponded regarding corrections to the article. Finally, eight months after Bill W. proposed the idea to Alexander for a follow-up, the article was released. “The Drunkard's Best Friend” was published in the April 1, 1950 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*.

“The Drunkard's Best Friend” was a success, just as its predecessor was. On April 22, 1950, Bill W. wrote to Ben Bibbs, editor of *The Saturday Evening Post*. He praised Jack Alexander and the two articles. Bill wrote:

Jack Alexander, in his recent Saturday Evening Post story ‘The Drunkard's Friend,’ has done it again.

We of Alcoholics Anonymous wish to tell how immensely grateful every man-jack of us is for this happy circumstance. It is not the least exaggeration to say that Jack's ‘Alcoholics Anonymous’ article of nine years ago brought recovery within the reach of 10,000 alcoholics and great happiness to as many homes. Since the public impression of this last piece of Jack's is tops, we make no doubt that it will accomplish a fine result.

We know that the whole world will one day agree that these two articles of Jack's about A.A.

are to be regarded the greatest public service the Saturday Evening Post has ever done. And that's saying a great deal, indeed.”

— BILL W. TO BEN BIBBS, EDITOR OF THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

Jack Alexander's Articles Still Appreciated

Jack Alexander passed away in 1975. In his West Texas Register obituary, he was credited as the newspaperman who made “Alcoholics Anonymous a major organization by the articles he wrote about its work.”

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Jack Alexander's Grapevine Article

AA Grapevine. (2020). <https://www.aagrapevine.org/Free-Story-July-2020>. Jack Alexander of Saturday Evening Post Fame Thought A.A.s Were Pulling His Leg. *AA Grapevine*.

MAY 1945

BY: JACK ALEXANDER | PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Ordinarily, diabetes isn't rated as one of the hazards of reporting, but the Alcoholics Anonymous article in *The Saturday Evening Post* came close to costing me my liver, and maybe A.A. neophytes ought to be told this when they are handed copies of the article to read. It might impress them. In the course of my fact gathering, I drank enough Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, ginger ale, Moxie and Sweetie to float the Saratoga. Then there was the thickly frosted cake so beloved of A.A. gatherings, and the heavily sweetened coffee, and the candy. Nobody can tell me that alcoholism isn't due solely to an abnormal craving for sugar, not even a learned psychiatrist. Otherwise the A.A. assignment was a pleasure.

It began when the Post asked me to look into A.A. as a possible article subject. All I knew of alcoholism at the time was that, like most other non-alcoholics, I had had my hand bitten (and my nose punched) on numerous occasions by alcoholic pals to whom I had extended a hand--unwisely, it always seemed afterward. Anyway, I had an understandable skepticism about the whole business.

My first contact with actual A.A.s came when a group of four of them called at my apartment one afternoon. This session was pleasant, but it didn't help my skepticism any. Each one introduced himself as an alcoholic who had gone "dry," as the official expression has it. They were good-looking and well-dressed and, as we sat around drinking Coca-Cola (which was all they would take), they spun yarns about their horrendous drinking misadventures. The stories sounded spurious, and after the visitors had left, I had a strong suspicion that my leg was being pulled. They had behaved like a bunch of actors sent out by some Broadway casting agency.

Next morning I took the subway to the headquarters of Alcoholics Anonymous in downtown Manhattan, where I met Bill W. This Bill W. is a very disarming guy and an expert at indoctrinating the stranger into the psychology, psychiatry, physiology, pharmacology and folklore of alcoholism. He spent the good part of a couple of days telling me what it was all about. It was an interesting experience, but at the end of it my fingers were still crossed. He knew it, of course, without my saying it, and in the days

that followed he took me to the homes of some of the A.A.s, where I got a chance to talk to the wives, too. My skepticism suffered a few minor scratches, but not enough to hurt. Then Bill shepherded me to a few A.A. meetings at a clubhouse somewhere in the West Twenties. Here were all manner of alcoholics, many of them, the nibblers at the fringe of the movement, still fragrant of liquor and needing a shave. Now I knew I was among a few genuine alcoholics anyway. The bearded, fume-breathing lads were A.A. skeptics, too, and now I had some company.

The week spent with Bill W. was a success from one standpoint. I knew I had the makings of a readable report but, unfortunately, I didn't quite believe in it and told Bill so. He asked why I didn't look in on the A.A.s in other cities and see what went on there. I agreed to do this, and we mapped out an itinerary. I went to Philadelphia first, and some of the local A.A.s took me to the psychopathic ward of Philadelphia General Hospital and showed me how they work on the alcoholic inmates. In that gloomy place, it was an impressive thing to see men who had bounced in and out of the ward themselves patiently jawing a man who was still haggard and shaking from a binge that wound up in the gutter.

Akron was the next stop. Bill met me there and promptly introduced me to Doc S., who is another hard man to disbelieve. There were more hospital visits, an A.A. meeting, and interviews with people who a year or two before were undergoing varying forms of the blind staggers. Now they seemed calm, well-spoken, steady-handed and prosperous, at least mildly prosperous.

Doc S. drove us both from Akron to Cleveland one night and the same pattern was repeated. The universality of alcoholism was more apparent here. In Akron it had been mostly factory workers. In Cleveland there were lawyers, accountants and other professional men, in addition to laborers. And again the same stories. The pattern was repeated also in Chicago, the only variation there being the presence at the meetings of a number of newspapermen. I had spent most of my working life on newspapers and I could really talk to these men. The real clincher, though, came in St. Louis, which is my hometown. Here I met a number of my own friends who were A.A.s, and the last remnants of skepticism vanished. Once rollicking rumpots, they were now sober. It didn't seem possible, but there it was.

When the article was published, the reader-mail was astonishing. Most of it came from desperate drinkers or their wives, or from mothers, fathers or interested friends. The letters were forwarded to the A.A. office in New York and from there were sent on to A.A. groups nearest the writers of the letters. I don't know exactly how many letters came in, all told, but the last time I checked, a year or so ago, it was around 6,000. They still trickle in from time to time, from people who have carried the article in their pockets

all this time, or kept it in the bureau drawer under the handkerchief case intending to do something about it.

I guess the letters will keep coming in for years, and I hope they do, because now I know that every one of them springs from a mind, either of an alcoholic or of someone close to him, which is undergoing a type of hell that Dante would have gagged at. And I know, too, that this victim is on the way to recovery, if he really wants to recover. There is something very heartening about this, particularly in a world which has been struggling toward peace for centuries without ever achieving it for very long periods of time.

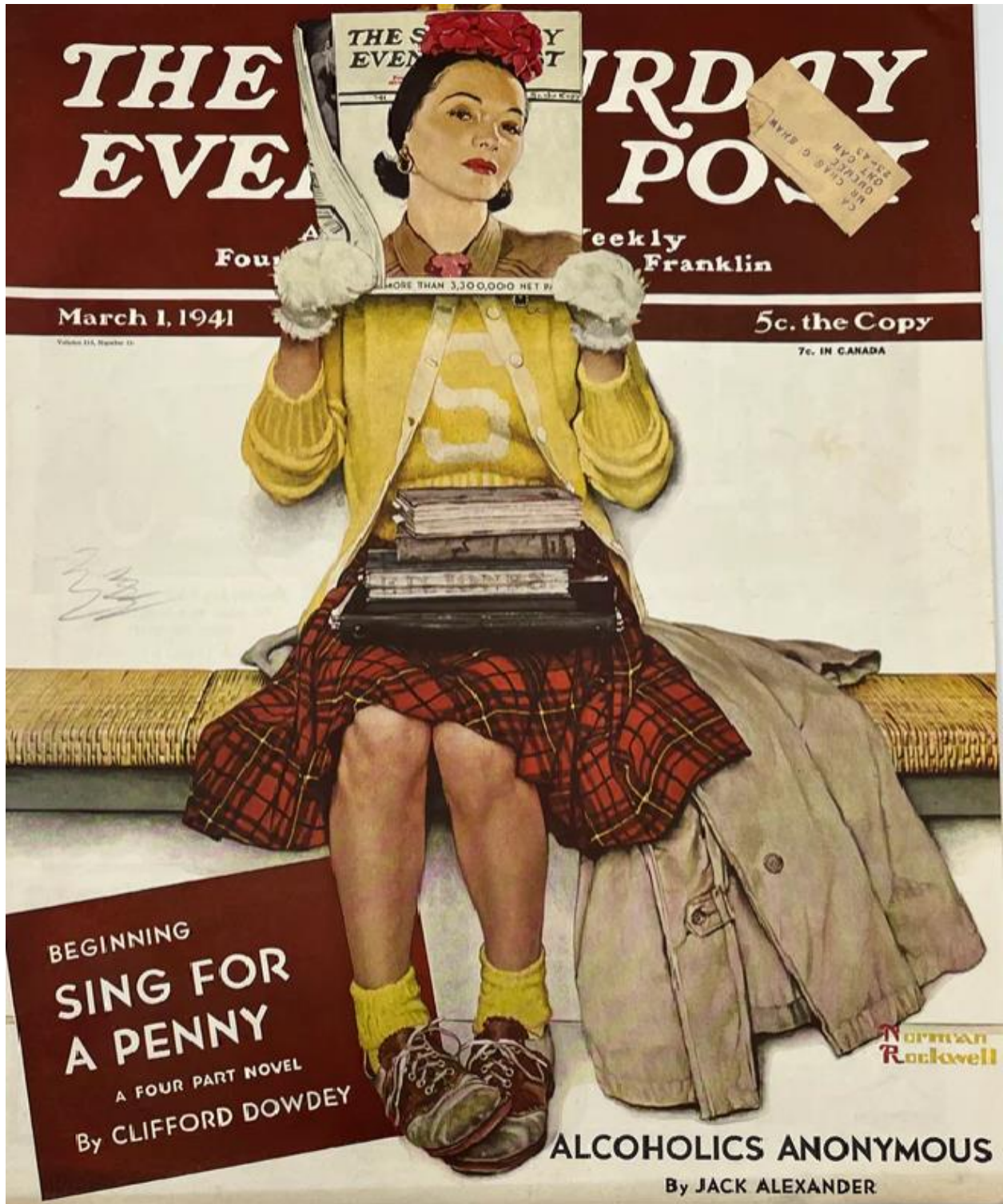
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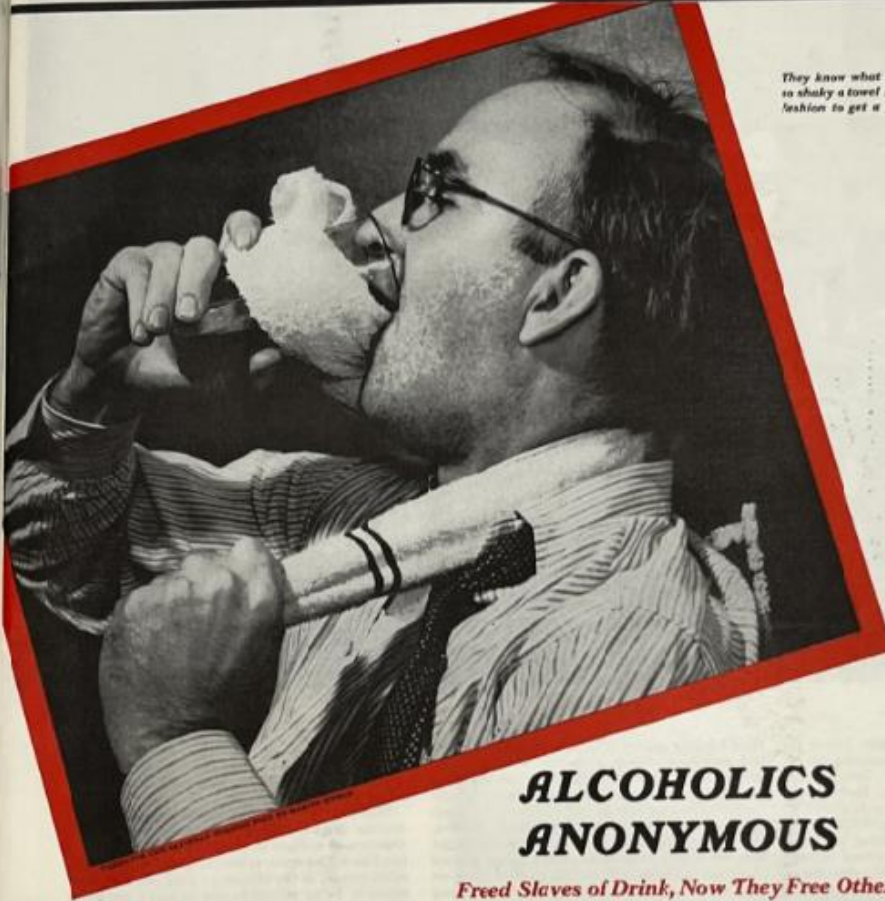
Images of the 1941 Publication

Images from recoverycollectibles.com.



Jack Alexander





They know what it is to have a hand to shake a towel must be used in this fashion to get a glass to the mouth.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Freed Slaves of Drink, Now They Free Others

By Jack Alexander

THREE men sat around the bed of an alcoholic patient in the psychopathic ward of Philadelphia General Hospital one afternoon a few weeks ago. The man in the bed, who was a complete stranger to them, had the drawn and slightly stupid look that nebrates get while being defogged after a bender. The only thing that was noteworthy about the callers, except for the obvious contrast between their well-groomed appearances and that of the patient, was the fact that each had been through the defogging process many times himself. They were members of Alcoholics Anonymous, a band of ex-problem drinkers who make an avocation of helping other alcoholics to beat the liquor habit.

The man in the bed was a mechanic. His visitors had been educated at Princeton, Yale and Pennsylvania and were, by occupation, a salesman, a lawyer and a publicity man. Less than a year before, one had been in shackles in the same ward. One of his companions had been what is known among alco-

holics as a sanitarium commuter. He had moved from place to place, bedeviling the staffs of the country's leading institutions for the treatment of alcoholics. The other had spent twenty years of life, all outside institution walls, making life miserable for himself, his family and his employers, as well as sundry well-meaning relatives who had had the temerity to intervene.

The air of the ward was thick with the aroma of paraldehyde, an unpleasant cocktail smelling like a mixture of alcohol and ether which hospitals sometimes use to taper off the paralyzed drinker and soothe his squirming nerves. The visitors seemed oblivious of this and of the depressing atmosphere that clings to even the nicest of psychopathic wards. They smoked and talked with the patient for twenty minutes or so, then left their personal cards and departed. If the man in the bed felt that he would like to see one of them again, they told him, he had only to put in a telephone call.

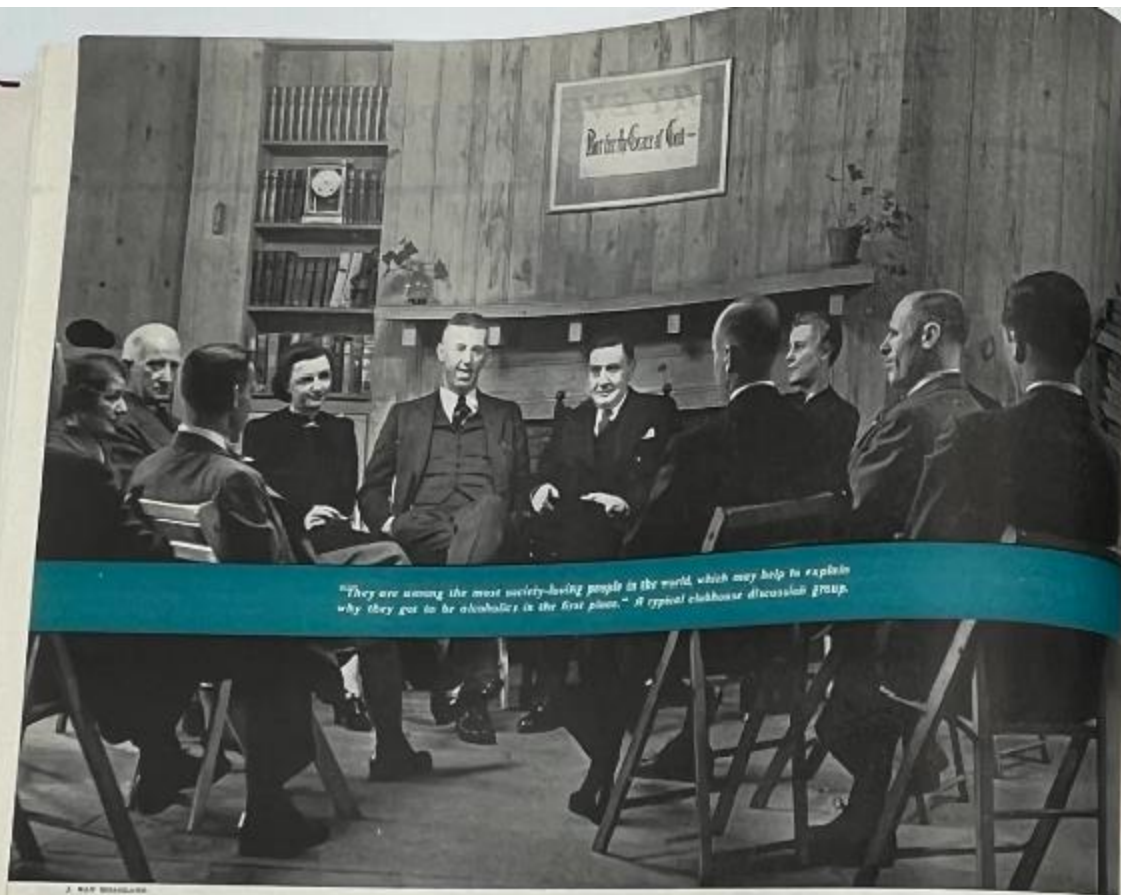
They made it plain that if he actually wanted to stop drinking, they would leave their work or get up in the middle of the night to hurry to where he was. If he did not choose to call, that would be the end of it. The members of Alcoholics Anonymous do not pursue or coddle a malingering prospect and they know the strange tricks of the alcoholic as a reformed swindler knows the art of bamboozling.

Herein lies much of the unique strength of a movement which, in the past six years, has brought recovery to around 2000 men and women, a large percentage of whom had been considered medically hopeless. Doctors and clergymen, working separately or together, have always managed to salvage a few cases. In isolated instances, drinkers have found their own methods of quitting. But the inroads into alcoholism have been negligible and it remains one of the great unsolved public-health enigmas.

By nature touchy and suspicious, the alcoholic likes to be left alone to work out his puzzle, and he has a convenient way of ignoring the tragedy which he inflicts meanwhile upon those who are close to him. He holds desperately to a conviction that, although he has not been able to handle alcohol in the past, he will ultimately succeed in becoming a controlled drinker. One of medicine's queerest animals, he is, as often as not, an acutely intelligent person. He fences with professional men and relatives who attempt to aid him and he gets a perverse satisfaction out of tripping them up in argument.

There is no specious excuse for drinking which the trouble shooters of Alcoholics Anonymous have not heard or used themselves. When one of their prospects hands them a rationalization for getting soused, they match it with half a dozen out of their own experiences. This upsets him a little and he gets defensive. He looks at their neat clothing and smoothly shaved faces and charges them with being goody-goodies who don't know what it is to struggle with drink. They reply by relating their own stories—the double Scotches and brandies before breakfast; the vague feeling of discomfort which precedes a drinking bout; the awakening from a spree without being able to account for the actions of several days and the haunting fear that possibly they had run down someone with their automobiles.

They tell of the eight-ounce bottles of gin hidden behind pictures and in crates from cellar to attic; of



"They are among the most society-loving people in the world, which may help to explain why they got to be alcoholics in the first place." - A typical clubhouse discussion group.

spending whole days in motion-picture houses to stave off the temptation to drink; of sneaking out of the office for quickies during the day. They talk of losing jobs and stealing money from their wives' purses; of putting pepper into whisky to give it a tang; of tipping on biters and sedative tablets, or on mouthwash or hair tonic; of getting into the habit of rumping outside the neighborhood tavern ten minutes before opening time. They describe a hand so jittery that it could not lift a pony to the lips without spilling the contents; of drinking liquor from a beer stein because it can be steadied with two hands, although at the risk of chipping a front tooth; of tying an end of a towel about a glass, looping the towel around the back of the neck and drawing the free end with the other hand, pulley fashion, to advance the glass to the mouth; of hands so shaky they feel as if they were about to snap off and fly into space; of sitting on hands for hours to keep them from doing this.

These and other bits of drinking lore usually manage to convince the alcoholic that he is talking to blood brothers. A bridge of confidence is thereby erected, spanning a gap which has baffled the physician, the minister, the priest or the hapless relatives. Over this connection, the trouble shooters convey, bit by bit, the details of a program for living which has worked for them and which, they feel, can work for any other alcoholic. They concede as out of their orbit only those who are psychotic or who are already suffering from the physical impairment known as wet brain. At the same time they see to it that the prospect gets whatever medical attention is needed.

Many doctors and staffs of institutions throughout the country now suggest Alcoholics Anonymous to

their drinking patients. In some towns the courts and probation officers co-operate with the local group. In a few city psychopathic divisions the workers of Alcoholics Anonymous are accorded the same visiting privileges as staff members. Philadelphia General is one of these. Dr. John F. Stouffer, the chief psychiatrist, says: "The alcoholics we get here are mostly those who cannot afford private treatment, and this is by far the greatest thing we have ever been able to offer them. Even among those who occasionally land back in here again we observe a profound change in personality. You would hardly recognize them."

The Illinois Medical Journal, in an editorial last December, went farther than Doctor Stouffer, in stating: "It is indeed a miracle when a person who for years has been numb or even comatose under the influence of alcohol and in whom his friends have

lost all confidence, will sit up all night with a 'drink' and at stated intervals administer a small amount of liquor in accordance with a doctor's order without taking a drop himself."

This is a reference to a common aspect of the Arabian Nights' adventures to which Alcoholics Anonymous workers dedicate themselves. Often it involves sitting upon, as well as up with, the interested person, as the impulse to jump out a window seems to be an attractive one to many alcoholics when in their cups. Only an alcoholic can equal another alcoholic's chest for hours with the proper combination of discipline and sympathy.

During a recent trip around the East and Middle West I met and talked with scores of A. A.'s as they call themselves, and found them to be unusually calm, tolerant people. Somehow they seemed better integrated than the average group of neo-alcoholic individuals. Their transformation from cop fighters, canned-beat drinkers and, in some instances, wife beaters, was startling. On one of the most influential newspapers in the country I found that the city editor, the assistant city editor and a nationally known reporter were A. A.'s, and stood in the confidence of their publisher.

In another city I heard a judge parole a drunken driver to an A. A. member. The latter, during his drinking days, had smashed several cars and had had his own operator's license suspended. The judge knew him and was glad to trust him. A brilliant executive of an advertising firm disclosed that two years ago he had been panhandling and sleeping in a doorway under an elevated structure. He had a favorite doorway, which he shared with other vagrants, and every few weeks he goes back and pays them a visit just to assure himself he isn't dreaming.

Beginning
**A FOUR-PART
 NOVEL ON PAGE 28**
 By Clifford Dowdley



The end—and the beginning. A. A.'s will not help a drunk unless he admits liquor has hit him as thoroughly as the man in this scene.

high. Statistics on traditional medical and religious cures are lacking, but it has been informally estimated that they are no more than 2 or 3 per cent effective on run-of-the-mine cases.

Although it is too early to state that Alcoholics Anonymous is the definitive answer to alcoholism, its brief record is impressive and it is receiving helpful support. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., helped defray the expense of getting it started and has gone out of his way to get other prominent men interested.

Rockefeller's gift was a small one, in deference to the insistence of the originators that the movement be kept on a voluntary, nonpaid basis. There are no salaried organizers, no dues, no officers and no central control. Locally, the needs of assembly halls are met by putting the hat at meetings. In small communities no collections are taken, as the gatherings are held in private homes. A small office in downtown New York acts merely as a clearinghouse for information. There is no name on the door and mail is received anonymously through Box 658, Church Street Annex post office. The only income, which is money received from the sale of a book describing the work, is handled by The Alcoholics Foundation, a board composed of three alcoholics and four non-alcoholics.

Drugging. Called to a hospital bedside, A. A.'s will come any time of the day or night, because they help themselves by helping a dipsomaniac.

In Akron, as in other manufacturing centers, the groups include a heavy element of manual workers. In the Cleveland Athletic Club I had luncheon with five lawyers, an accountant, an engineer, three salesmen, an insurance man, a buyer, a bartender, a chain-store manager, a manager of an independent store and a manufacturer's representative. They were members of a central committee which coordinates the work of nine neighborhood groups. Cleveland, with more than 450 members, is the biggest of the A. A. centers. The next largest are located in Chicago, Akron, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Washington and New York. All told, there are groups in about fifty cities and towns.

Self-Insurance Against Demon Rum

IN DISCUSSING their work, the A. A.'s speak of their drunk-rescuing as "insurance" for themselves. Experience within the group has shown, they said, that once a reformed drinker slows up in this work he is likely to go back to drinking, himself. There is, they agreed, no such thing as an ex-alcoholic. If one is an alcoholic—that is, a person who is unable to drink normally—one remains an alcoholic until he dies, just as a diabetic remains a diabetic. The best he can hope for is to become an arrested case, with drunk-saving as his insulin. At least, the A. A.'s say so, and medical opinion tends to support them. All but a few said that they had lost all desire for alcohol. Most serve liquor in their homes when friends drop in and they still go to bars with companions who drink. The A. A.'s tinkle on soft drinks and coffee.

One, a sales manager, acts as bartender at his company's annual jamboree in Atlantic City and spends his nights tucking the celebrators into their beds. Only a few of those who recover fail to lose the feeling that at any minute they may thoughtlessly take one drink and skyrocket off on a disastrous binge. An A. A. who is a clerk in an Eastern city hasn't had a salfter in three and a half years, but says that he still has to walk fast past saloons to circumvent the old impulse; but he is an exception. The only hang-over from the wild days that plagues the A. A. is a recurrent nightmare. In the dream, he finds himself off on a rousing whooper-dooper, frantically trying to conceal his condition from the community. Even this symptom disappears shortly, in most cases. Surprisingly, the rate of employment among these people, who formerly drank themselves out of job after job, is said to be around 80 per cent.



BY MERRILL STEVENSON, INC.

One-hundred-per-cent effectiveness with non-psychotic drinkers who sincerely want to quit is claimed by the workers of Alcoholics Anonymous. The program will not work, they add, with those who only "want to want to quit," or who want to quit because they are afraid of losing their families or their jobs. The effective desire, they state, must be based upon enlightened self-interest; the applicant must want to get away from liquor to head off incarceration or premature death. He must be fed up with the stark social loneliness which engulfs the uncontrolled drinker and he must want to put some order into his bungled life.

As it is impossible to denigrate all border-line applicants, the working percentage of recovery falls below the 100-per-cent mark. According to A. A. estimation, 50 per cent of the alcoholics taken in hand recover almost immediately; 25 per cent get well after suffering a relapse or two, and the rest remains doubtful. This rate of success is exceptionally

In Chicago twenty-five doctors work hand in hand with Alcoholics Anonymous, contributing their services and referring their own alcoholic patients to the group, which now numbers around 200. The same co-operation exists in Cleveland and to a lesser degree in other centers. A physician, Dr. W. D. Silkworth, of New York City, gave the movement its first encouragement. However, many doctors remain skeptical. Dr. Foster Kennedy, an eminent New York neurologist, probably had these in mind when he stated at a meeting a year ago: "The aim of those concerned in this effort against alcoholism is high, their success has been considerable and I believe medical men of good will should aid."

The active help of two medical men of good will, Drs. A. Wiss Hammer and C. Dudley Saul, has assisted greatly in making the Philadelphia unit one of the more effective of the younger groups. The movement there had its

(Continued on Page 10)

mark of ever having been folded. Will you explain that?"

"The witness looked stunned. 'I can explain it. This bid was never in that box. Isn't that so?'"

Judge Rowan said, "Show me that paper."

"Well, Mr. Director? What have you to say?" He returned the bid to John. "What do you suppose happened?"

"Well, we know one thing—this bid was never in that box. Yet McGurk and Company did have one there. My theory is that the director misread the case bid after noting what the others had bid. But this was dangerous; someone might ask to see it, which, in fact, happened. To obviate this, McGurk and Company supplied him with several bids, spaced five or ten thousand dollars apart—and in round figures, easier to remember—which he brought in his folder. It was one of these bids—the highest that would take the award—which he dictated, and which he showed Mr. Latham. The bid was simplified by the new ordinance of council permitting flat sums to be posted instead of the former five per cent. Upon destruction of the original McGurk bids, discovery seemed impossible. But whoever thought of the scheme forgot one thing—folding that paper to make it look as though it came from that box."

"Your honor! This is just slander! Nothing but theory!"

"You can never explain why that bid shows no fold. . . . Continue, Mr. Deewinkle."

"Well, the conspiracy with regard to the bid implies a conspiracy with re-

gard to the cement. Each was consideration for the other. What the division is sure of this—Jennings was simply a straw party. It sums up to this: The defendant was aware of the fraud on Porter and knew all along that his title to the cement was invalid. That, your honor, constitutes his criminal intent."

The jurist nodded. "And I will hold him for court. You will also see that Feeney applies for a parole. I'm afraid I was hasty in that case. But all this is minor. You will furnish a transcript of this case to the City Solicitor, and you will take steps to prosecute all parties—including the missing Jennings—for conspiracy. Please come up here. . . . When you asked for this warrant, I thought it was some publicity stunt. Now I see you were sending a little man after a big one." He smiled broadly. "Get out of my sight before I cite you for misuse of process!"

Latham said indignantly, "Brennan knew such a registered letter would never reach Porter. When I think of their learning of the poor man's condition and taking advantage of it—I suppose they didn't think he'd survive. And then lying to him so he couldn't protect himself. But you scalped them! Where's Officer Stuart? We'd like to meet him."

"Here he is. . . . Officer, I was telling these men how I ruined your vacation—"

Stuart stopped him, grinning. "Lieutenant, if you please. The commissioner was at the hearing. Ruined my vacation? I'll take any number like that."

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

(Continued from Page 11)

beginning in an offhand way in February, 1940, when a businessman who was an A. A. convert was transferred to Philadelphia from New York. Fearful of backsliding for lack of rescue work, the newcomer rounded up three local bar flies and started to work on them. He got them dry and the quartet began ferreting out other cases. By last December fifteenth, ninety-nine alcoholics had joined up. Of these, eighty-six were now total abstainers—thirty-nine from one to three months, seventeen from three to six months, and twenty-five from six to ten months. Five who had joined the unit after having belonged in other cities had been nondrinkers from one to three years.

At the other end of the time scale, Akron, which cradled the movement, holds the intramural record for sustained abstinence. According to a recent check-up, two members have been riding the A. A. wagon for five and a half years, one for five years, three for four and a half years, one for the same period with one skid, three for three and a half years, seven for three years, three for three years with one skid each, one for two and a half years and thirteen for two years. Previously, most of the Akronites and Philadelphians had been unable to stay away from liquor for longer than a few weeks.

In the Middle West the work has been almost exclusively among persons who have not arrived at the institutional stage. The New York group, which has a similar nucleus, makes a side-line specialty of committed cases and has achieved striking results. In the summer of 1939 the group began working on the alcoholics confined in Rockland State Hospital, at Orangeburg, a vast mental

sanitarium which gets the hopeless alcoholic backwash of the big population centers. With the encouragement of Dr. R. E. Blaisdel, the medical superintendent, a unit was formed within the walls and meetings were held in the recreation hall. New York A. A.'s went to Orangeburg to give talks and on Sunday evenings the patients were brought in state-owned busses to a clubhouse which the Manhattan group rents on the West Side.

Last July first, eleven months later, records kept at the hospital showed that of fifty-four patients released to Alcoholics Anonymous, seventeen had had no relapse and fourteen others had had only one. Of the rest, nine had gone back to drinking in their home communities, twelve had returned to the hospital and two had not been traced. Doctor Blaisdel has written favorably about the work to the State Department of Mental Hygiene and he praised it officially in his last annual report.

Even better results were obtained in two public institutions in New Jersey, Greystone Park and Overbrook, which attract patients of better economic and social background than Rockland, because of their nearness to prosperous suburban villages. Of seven patients released from the Greystone Park institution in two years, five have abstained for periods of one to two years, according to A. A. records. Eight of ten released from Overbrook have abstained for about the same length of time. The others have had from one to several relapses.

Why some people become alcoholics is a question on which authorities disagree. Few think that anyone is "born an alcoholic." One may be born, they

say, with a hereditary predisposition to alcoholism, just as one may be born with a vulnerability to tuberculosis. The rest seems to depend upon environment and experience, although one theory has it that some people are allergic to alcohol, as hay-fever sufferers are to pollens. Only one note is found to be common to all alcoholics—emotional immaturity. Closely related to this is an observation that an unusually large number of alcoholics start out in life as an only child, as a youngest child, as the only boy in a family of girls or the only girl in a family of boys. Many have records of childhood precocity and were what are known as spoiled children.

Frequently the situation is complicated by an off-center home atmosphere in which one parent is unduly cruel, the other overindulgent. Any combination of these factors, plus a divorce or two, tends to produce neurotic children who are poorly equipped emotionally to face the ordinary realities of adult life. In seeking escapes, one may immerse himself in his business, working twelve to fifteen hours a day, or in sports or in some artistic side-line. Another finds what he thinks is a pleasant escape in drink. It bolsters his opinion of himself and temporarily wipes away any feeling of social inferiority which he may have. Light drinking leads to heavy drinking. Friends and family are alienated and employers become disgusted. The drinker smolders with resentment and wallows in self-pity. He indulges in childish rationalizations to justify his drinking—he has been working hard and he deserves to relax, his throat hurts from an old tonsillotomy and a drink would ease the pain, he has a headache, his wife does not understand him, his nerves are jumpy, everybody is against him, and so on and on. He unconsciously becomes a chronic excuse maker for himself.

All the time he is drinking he tells himself, and those who butt into his affairs, that he can really become a controlled drinker if he wants to. To demonstrate his strength of will, he goes for weeks without taking a drop. He makes a point of calling at his favorite bar at a certain time each day and ostentatiously sipping milk or a carbonated beverage, not realizing that he is indulging in juvenile exhibitionism. Falsely encouraged, he shifts to a routine of one beer a day, and that is the beginning of the end once more. Beer leads inevitably to more beer and then to hard liquor. Hard liquor leads to another first-rate bender. Oddly, the trigger which sets off the explosion is as apt to be a stroke of business success as it is to be a run of bad luck. An alcoholic can stand neither prosperity nor adversity.

Curing by Catharsis

The victim is puzzled on coming out of the alcoholic fog. Without his being aware of any change, a habit had gradually become an obsession. After a while, he no longer needs his rationalizations to justify the fatal first drink. All he knows is that he feels swamped by uneasiness or elation, and before he realizes what is happening he is standing at a bar with an empty whisky pony in front of him and a stimulating sensation in his throat. By some peculiar quirk of his mind, he has been able to draw a curtain over the memory of the intense pain and remorse caused by preceding stem-winders. After many experiences of this kind, the alcoholic begins to realize that he

does not understand himself; he wonders whether his power of will, though strong in other fields, isn't defenseless against alcohol. He may go on trying to defeat his obsession and wind up in a sanitarium. He may give up the fight as hopeless and try to kill himself. Or he may seek outside help.

If he applies to Alcoholics Anonymous, he is first brought around to admit that alcohol has him whipped and that his life has become unmanageable. Having achieved this state of intellectual humility, he is given a dose of religion in its broadest sense. He is asked to believe in a Power that is greater than himself, or at least to keep an open mind on that subject while he goes on with the rest of the program. Any concept of the higher Power is acceptable. A skeptic or agnostic may choose to think of his Inner Self, the

This catharsis is regarded as important because of the compulsion which a feeling of guilt exerts in the alcoholic obsession. As nothing tends to push an alcoholic toward the bottle more than personal resentments, the pupil also makes out a list of his grudges and resolves not to be stirred by them. At this point he is ready to start working on other active alcoholics. By the process of extroversion, which the work entails, he is enabled to think less of his own troubles.

The more drinkers he succeeds in swinging into Alcoholics Anonymous, the greater his responsibility to the group becomes. He can't get drunk now without injuring the people who have proved themselves his best friends. He is beginning to grow up emotionally and to quit being a leannor. If raised in an orthodox church he usually, but

Group, and had shown no improvement. On Mother's Day, 1935, he staggered home, in typical drunk fashion, lugging an expensive potted plant, which he placed in his wife's lap. Then he went upstairs and passed out.

At that moment, nervously pacing the lobby of an Akron hotel, was the broker from New York, whom we shall arbitrarily call Griffith. Griffith was in a jam. In an attempt to obtain control of a company and rebuild his financial fences, he had come out to Akron and engaged in a fight for proxies. He had lost the fight. His hotel bill was unpaid. He was almost flat broke. Griffith wanted a drink.

During his career in Wall Street, Griffith had turned some sizable deals and had prospered, but, through ill-timed drinking bouts, had lost out on his main chances. Five months before coming to Akron he had gone on the water wagon, through the ministrations of the Oxford Group in New York. Fascinated by the problem of alcoholism, he had many times gone back as a visitor to a Central Park West detoxicating hospital, where he had been a patient, and talked to the inmates. He effected no recoveries, but found that by working on other alcoholics he could stave off his own craving.

A Doctor for a Patient

A stranger in Akron, Griffith knew no alcoholics with whom he could wrestle. A church directory, which gave him an idea. He telephoned one of the clergymen listed and through him got in touch with a member of the local Oxford Group. This person was a friend of Doctor Armstrong's and was able to introduce the physician and the broker at dinner. In this manner Doctor Armstrong became Griffith's first real disciple. He was a shaky one, at first. After a few weeks of abstinence, he went East to a medical convention and came home in a liquid state. Griffith, who had stayed in Akron to iron out some legal tangles arising from the proxy battle, talked him back to sobriety. That was on June 10, 1935. The nips the physician took from a bottle proffered by Griffith on that day were the last drinks he ever took.

Griffith's lawsuits dragged on, holding him over in Akron for six months. He moved his baggage to the Armstrong home, and together the pair struggled with other alcoholics. Before Griffith went back to New York, two more Akron converts had been obtained. Meanwhile, both Griffith and Doctor Armstrong had withdrawn from the Oxford Group, because they felt that its aggressive evangelism and some of its other methods were hindrances in working with alcoholics. They put their own technique on a strict take-it-or-leave-it basis and kept it there.

Progress was slow. After Griffith had returned East, Doctor Armstrong and his wife, a Wellesley graduate, converted their home into a free refuge for alcoholics and an experimental laboratory for the study of the guests' behavior. One of the guests, who, unknown to his hosts, was a manic depressive as well as an alcoholic, ran wild one night with a kitchen knife. He was overcome before he had stabbed anyone. After a year and a half, a total of ten persons had responded to the program and were abstaining. What was left of the family savings had gone into the work. The physician's new

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"I guess he'll just have to learn from experience!"

miracle of growth, a tree, man's wonderment at the physical universe, the structure of the atom or mere mathematical infinity. Whatever form is visualized, the neophyte is taught that he must rely upon it and, in his own way, to pray to the Power for strength.

He next makes a sort of moral inventory of himself with the private aid of another person—one of his A. A. sponsors, a priest, a minister, a psychiatrist, or anyone else he fancies. If it gives him any relief, he may get up at a meeting and recite his misdeeds, but he is not required to do so. He restores what he may have stolen while intoxicated and arranges to pay off old debts and to make good on rubber checks; he makes amends to persons he has abused and, in general, cleans up his past as well as he is able to. It is not uncommon for his sponsors to lend him money to help out in the early stages.

not always, becomes a regular communicant again.

Simultaneously with the making over of the alcoholic goes the process of adjusting his family to his new way of living. The wife or husband of an alcoholic, and the children, too, frequently become neurotics from being exposed to drinking excesses over a period of years. Re-education of the family is an essential part of a follow-up program which has been devised.

Alcoholics Anonymous, which is a synthesis of old ideas rather than a new discovery, owes its existence to the collaboration of a New York stockbroker and an Akron physician. Both alcoholics, they met for the first time a little less than six years ago. In thirty-five years of periodic drinking, Doctor Armstrong, to give the physician a fictitious name, had drunk himself out of most of his practice. Armstrong had tried everything, including the Oxford

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sobriety caused a revival in his practice, but not enough of one to carry the extra expenses. The Armstrongs, nevertheless, carried on, on borrowed money. Griffith, who had a Spartan wife, too, turned his Brooklyn home into a duplicate of the Akron ménage. Mrs. Griffith, a member of an old Brooklyn family, took a job in a department store and in her spare time played nurse to inebriates. The Griffiths also borrowed, and Griffith managed to make odd bits of money around the brokerage houses. By the spring of 1939 the Armstrongs and the Griffiths had between them cosseted about one hundred alcoholics into sobriety.

In a book which they published at that time the recovered drinkers described the cure program and related their personal stories. The title was *Alcoholics Anonymous*. It was adopted as a name for the movement itself, which up to then had none. As the book got into circulation, the movement spread rapidly.

Today, Doctor Armstrong is still struggling to patch up his practice. The going is hard. He is in debt because of his contributions to the movement and the time he devotes gratis to alcoholics. Being a pivotal man in the group, he is unable to turn down the requests for help which flood his office.

Griffith is even deeper in the hole. For the past two years he and his wife have had no home in the ordinary sense of the word. In a manner reminiscent of the primitive Christians they have moved about, finding shelter in the homes of A. A. colleagues and sometimes wearing borrowed clothing.

A Self-Starting Movement

Having got something started, both the prime movers want to retire to the fringe of their movement and spend more time getting back on their feet financially. They feel that the way the thing is set up it is virtually self-operating and self-multiplying. Because of the absence of figureheads and the fact that there is no formal body of belief to promote, they have no fear that *Alcoholics Anonymous* will degenerate into a cult.

The self-starting nature of the movement is apparent from letters in the files of the New York office. Many persons have written in saying that they stopped drinking as soon as they read the book, and made their homes meeting places for small local chapters. Even a fairly large unit, in Little Rock, got started in this way. An Akron civil engineer and his wife, in gratitude for his cure four years ago, have been steadily taking alcoholics into their home. Out of thirty-five such wards, thirty-one have recovered.

Twenty pilgrims from Cleveland caught the idea in Akron and returned home to start a group of their own. From Cleveland, by various means, the movement has spread to Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Indianapolis, Atlanta, San Francisco, Evansville and other cities. An alcoholic Cleveland newspaperman with a surgically collapsed lung moved to Houston for his health. He got a job on a Houston paper and through a series of articles which he wrote for it started an A. A. unit which now has thirty-five members. One Houston member has moved to Miami and is now laboring to unseat some of the more eminent winter-colony lushes. A Cleveland traveling salesman is responsible for starting small units in many different parts of the country. Fewer than half of the

A. A. members have ever seen Griffith or Doctor Armstrong.

To an outsider who is mystified, as most of us are, by the antics of problem drinking friends, the results which have been achieved are amazing. This is especially true of the more virulent cases, a few of which are herewith sketched under names that are not their own.

Sarah Martin was a product of the F. Scott Fitzgerald era. Born of wealthy parents in a Western city, she went to Eastern boarding schools and "finished" in France. After making her debut, she married. Sarah spent her nights drinking and dancing until daylight. She was known as a girl who could carry a lot of liquor. Her husband had a weak stomach and she became disgusted with him. They were quickly divorced. After her father's fortune had been erased in 1929, Sarah got a job in New York and supported herself. In 1932, seeking adventure, she went to Paris to live and set up a business of her own, which was successful. She continued to drink heavily and stayed drunk longer than usual. After a spree in 1933 she was informed that she had tried to throw herself out a window. During another bout she did jump, or fall—she doesn't remember which—out of a first-floor window. She landed face first on the sidewalk and was laid up for six months of bone-setting, dental work and plastic surgery.

In 1936 Sarah Martin decided that if she changed her environment by returning to the United States, she would be able to drink normally. This childish faith in geographical change is a classic delusion which all alcoholics get at one time or another. She was drunk all the way home on the boat. New York frightened her and she drank to escape it. Her money ran out and she borrowed from friends. When the friends cut her, she hung around Third Avenue bars cadging drinks from strangers. Up to this point, she had diagnosed her trouble as a nervous breakdown. Not until she had com-

mited herself to several sanitariums did she realize, through reading, that she was an alcoholic. On advice of a staff doctor, she got in touch with an Alcoholics Anonymous group. Today she has another good job and spends many of her nights sitting on hysterical women drinkers to prevent them from diving out of windows. In her late thirties, Sarah Martin is an attractively serene woman. The Paris surgeons did handsomely by her.

Watkins is a shipping clerk in a factory. Injured in an elevator mishap in 1927, he was furloughed with pay by a company which was thankful that he did not sue for damages. Having nothing to do during a long convalescence, Watkins loafed in speak-easies. Formerly a moderate drinker, he started to go on drunks lasting several months. His furniture went for debt and his wife fled, taking their three children. In eleven years, Watkins was arrested twelve times and served eight workhouse sentences. Once, in an attack of delirium tremens, he circulated a rumor among the prisoners that the county was poisoning the food in order to reduce the workhouse population and save expenses. A mess-hall riot resulted. In another fit of D. T.'s, during which he thought the man in the cell above was trying to pour hot lead on him, Watkins slashed his own wrists and throat with a razor blade. While recuperating in an outside hospital, with eighty-six stitches, he swore never to drink again. He was drunk before the final bandages were removed. Two years ago a former drinking companion got him into Alcoholics Anonymous and he hasn't touched liquor since. His wife and children have returned and the home has new furniture. Back at work, Watkins has paid off the major part of \$2000 in debts and petty alcoholic thefts and has his eye on a new automobile.

At twenty-two, Tracy, a precocious son of well-to-do parents, was credit manager for an investment-banking firm whose name has become a symbol of the money-mad 20's. After the

firm's collapse during the stock-market crash, he went into advertising and worked up to a post which paid him \$25,000 a year. On the day his son was born Tracy was fired. Instead of appearing in Boston to close a big advertising contract, he had gone on a spree and had wound up in Chicago, looting out on the contract. Always a heavy drinker, Tracy became a bum. He tipped on canned heat and hair tonic and begged from cops, who are always easy touches for amounts up to a dime. On one sleazy night Tracy sold his shoes to buy a drink, putting on a pair of rubbers he had found in a doorway and stuffing them with paper to keep his feet warm.

The Convivial A. A.'s

He started committing himself to sanitariums, more to get in out of the cold than anything else. In one institution, a physician got him interested in the A. A. program. As part of it, Tracy, a Catholic, made a general confession and returned to the church, which he had long since abandoned, which he had long since abandoned. He slithered back to alcohol a few times, but after a relapse in February, 1939, Tracy took no more drinks. He has since then beat his way up again to \$18,000 a year in advertising.

Victor Hugo would have delighted in Brewster, a heavy-thewed adventurer who took life the hard way. Brewster was a lumberjack, cow hand and wartime aviator. During the postwar era he took up flask-toting and was soon doing a Cook's tour of the sanitariums. In one of them, after hearing about shock cures, he bribed the Negro attendant in the morgue, with gifts of cigarettes, to permit him to drop in each afternoon and meditate over a cadaver. The plan worked well until one day he came upon a dead man who, by a freak of facial contortion, wore what looked like a grin. Brewster met up with the A. A.'s in December, 1938, and after achieving abstinence got a sales job which involved much walking. Meanwhile, he had got cataracts on both eyes. One was removed, giving him distance sight with the aid of thick-lens spectacles. He used the other eye for close-up vision, keeping it dilated with an eye-drop solution in order to avoid being run down in traffic. Then he developed a swollen, or milk, leg. With these disabilities, Brewster tramped the streets for six months before he caught up with his drawing account. Today, at fifty, and still hampered by his physical handicaps, he is making his calls and is earning around \$400 a month.

For the Brewsters, the Martins, the Watkinses, the Tracys and the other reformed alcoholics, congenial company is now available wherever they happen to be. In the larger cities A. A.'s meet one another daily at lunch in favored restaurants. The Cleveland groups give big parties on New Year's and other holidays, at which gallons of coffee and soft drinks are consumed. Chicago holds open house on Friday, Saturday and Sunday—alternately, on the North, West and South Sides—so that no lonesome A. A. need revert to liquor over the week end for lack of companionship. Some play cribbage or bridge, the winner of each hand contributing to a kitty for paying of entertainment expenses. The others listen to the radio, dance, eat or just talk. All alcoholics, drunk or sober, like to gah. They are among the most society-loving people in the world, which may help to explain why they got to be alcoholics in the first place.

Printed in U. S. A.



"I smuggled in an unexploded bomb for the living-room mantelpiece!"

The Drunkard's Best Friend

When a farmer in Aroostook County, Maine, announces that he is going to bake a cake, he is speaking figuratively. What he means is that he is bored with the loneliness of Aroostook's vast reaches, with the county's most famous product, potatoes, and with life in general; and that, to relieve his boredom, he is going on a vanilla-extract bender. In order to buy liquor he might have to drive as much as a hundred miles, over drifted or rutted roads, to reach a town uninhibited by local option. He tipples on vanilla, which is rich in alcohol, because it is easily and legally obtainable, in quantity, at the nearest grocery store. Grocers in local-option towns ordinarily do a thriving vanilla business with alcoholically inclined agrarians, but of late the strange society known as Alcoholics Anonymous has taken root in Aroostook and a disturbing effect on the vanilla turnover has been observed.

"You wouldn't believe it, Ned," one storekeeper lamented to a drummer on a gray day last November, "but my vanilla sales is almost down to normal."

The impact of Alcoholics Anonymous upon a community is not always that striking, but it is doing quite well at its self-appointed task, which, as almost everyone knows by now, is that of helping confirmed drunks to quit drinking. The help is provided solely by alcoholics who, through adhering to a specified program of living, have managed to arrest their own disastrous drinking habits. (AA members never call themselves ex-alcoholics, regardless of the length of their sobriety, the theory being that they are ineradicably alcoholics by temperament, and are therefore always vulnerable to a relapse.)

During the past few years Alcoholics Anonymous has extended its influence overseas, and one of its more dedicated workers is the honorable secretary of the Dublin group. A Sandhurst graduate and a veteran of twenty-six years in the British Army, he is still remembered in some portions of the Middle East for his inspired work with the bottle. Now an abstainer, he lives off his major's pension and the profits of a small retail business. Like all faithful members of AA, he spends much of his spare time in shepherding other luses toward total abstinence, lest he revert to the pot himself.

The honorable secretary is a man of few spoken words, but he carries on a large correspondence within the fraternity. His letters, which are notable for their eloquent understatement, are prized by fellow AAs in this country and are passed around at meetings. One of his more fascinating communiqués, received here in October, described a missionary trip to Cork, in company with another AA gentleman. The purpose of the trip was to bring the glad tidings of freedom to any Corkonians who might happen to be besotted and unshriven, and to stimulate the local group, which was showing small promise.

This was the honorable secretary's chronological report:

- **8 p.m.** The chairman and myself sat alone.
- **8:05** One lady arrived, a nonalcoholic
- **8:15** One man arrived
- **8:20** A County Cork member arrived to say he couldn't stay, as his children had just developed measles.
- **8:25** The lone lady departed.
- **8:30** Two more men arrived.
- **8:40** One more man arrived, and I decided to make a start.
- **8:45** The first man arrival stated that he had to go out and have a drink.
- **8:50** He came back.
- **8:55** Three more arrived.
- **9:10** Another lady, propped up by a companion, arrived, gazed glassily around, collected some literature and departed unsteadily.
- **9:30** The chairman and I had finished speaking.
- **9:45** We reluctantly said good night to the new members, who seemed very interested.

In summing up, the secretary said: "A night of horror at first, developing quite well. I think they have good prospects, once the thing is launched."

To a skeptic, the honorable secretary's happy prognosis in the face of initial discouragement may sound foolishly hopeful. To those already within the fraternity and familiar with the sluggardly and chaotic character of AA local-group growth in its early stages, he was merely voicing justifiable optimism. For some years after its inception, in 1935, the Alcoholics Anonymous movement itself made slow progress. As the work of salvaging other drunks is essential to maintaining the sobriety of the already-salvaged brethren, the earnest handful of early salvagees spent some worrisome months. Hundreds of thousands of toppers were prowling about in full alcoholic cry, but few would pause long enough to listen.

Six years after it all began, when this magazine first examined the small but encouraging phenomenon (Post, March 1, 1941), the band could count 2000 members, by scraping hard, and some of these were still giving off residual fumes. In the nine years which have intervened since that report, the small phenomenon has become a relatively large one. Today its listed membership exceeds 90,000. Just how many of these have substantial sobriety records is a matter of conjecture, as the movement, which has no control at the top and is constantly ridden by maverick tendencies, operates in a four-alarm-fire atmosphere, and no one has the time to check up. A reasonable guess would be that about two thirds have been sober for anywhere from

six months to fifteen years, and that the rest have stretched out their periods of sobriety between twisters to the point where they are at least able to keep their jobs.

The intake of shaky-fingered newcomers, now at its highest in AA history, is running at the rate of around 20,000 a year. The number that will stick is, again, a matter of conjecture. If experience repeats, according to AA old-timers, about one half will stay sober from the start, and one fourth will achieve sobriety after a few skids; the other one fourth will remain problem drinkers. A problem drinker, by definition, is one who takes a drink for some compulsive reason he cannot identify and, having taken it, is unable to stop until he is drunk and acting like a lunatic.

How Many of the Four Million Will Join?

It is tempting to become over sanguine about the success of Alcoholics Anonymous to date. Ninety thousand persons, roaring drunk or roaring sober, are but a drop in the human puddle, and they represent only a generous dip out of the human alcoholic puddle. According to varying estimates, between 750,000 and 1,000,000 problem drinkers are still on the loose in the United States alone. Their numbers will inevitably be swelled in future years by recruits from the ranks of between 3,000,000 and 4,000,000 Americans who, by medical standards, drink too much for their own good. Some of these millions will taper off or quit when they reach the age at which the miseries of a hangover seem too great a price to pay for an evening of artificially induced elation; but some will slosh over into the compulsive-drinker class.

The origins of alcoholism, which is now being widely treated as a major public-health problem, are as mysterious as those of cancer. They are perhaps even harder to pin down, because they involve psychic as well as physical elements. Currently, the physical aspect is being investigated by universities and hospitals, and by publicly and privately financed foundations. Some large business and industrial firms, concerned about reduced productivity and absenteeism, are providing medical and psychiatric aid to alcoholic employees. The firms' physicians are also digging into the alcoholic puzzle. The most plausible tentative explanation that any of these investigative efforts has come up with is that alcoholism is a sickness resembling that caused by various allergies.

Psychiatry has its own approach to the problem; it is successful in only a small percentage of cases. Clergymen, using a spiritual appeal, and the beset relatives of alcoholics, using everything from moral suasion to a simple bat in the jaw, manage to persuade a few chronics to become unchronic. So does one school of institutional treatment, which insists that alcoholism is solely the result of "twisted thinking" and aims at unraveling the mental quirks.

But the Alcoholics Anonymous approach — which leans on medicine, uses a few elementary principles of psychiatry and employs a strong spiritual weapon — is the only

one which has done anything resembling a mop-up job. Whatever one's attitude toward AA may be, and a lot of people are annoyed by its sometimes ludicrous strivings and its deadpan thumping of the sobriety tub, one can scarcely ignore its palpable results. To anyone who has ever been a drunk or who has had to endure the alcoholic cruelties of a drunk—and that would embrace a large portion of the human family — 90,000 alcoholics reconverted into working citizens represent a massive dose of pure gain. In human terms, the achievements of Alcoholics Anonymous stand out as one of the few encouraging developments of a rather grim and destructive half-century.

Drunks are prolific of excuses for their excessive drinking, and the most frequent alibi is that no one really understands what a struggle they have. With more than 3,000 AA groups at work in the United States, and every member a veteran of the struggle, this excuse is beginning to lose its validity, if it ever had any validity. In most cities of any size the fraternity has a telephone listed in its own name. A nickel call will bring a volunteer worker who won't talk down to a drunk, as the average nonalcoholic has a way of doing, but will talk convincingly in the jargon of the drunk. The worker won't do any urging; he will describe the Alcoholics Anonymous program in abbreviated form and depart. The drunk is invited to telephone again if he is serious about wanting to become sober. Or a drunk, on his own initiative or in tow of a relative, may drop in at the AA office, where he will receive the same non-evangelistic treatment. In the larger cities the offices do a rushing trade, especially after weekends or legal holidays. Many small-town and village groups maintain clubrooms over the bank or feed store; in one Canadian town the AAs share quarters with a handbook operator, using it by night after the bookie has gone home. Some of these groups carry a standing classified advertisement in the daily or weekly newspaper. If they don't, a small amount of inquiry will disclose the meeting place of the nearest group; a local doctor, or clergyman, or policeman will know.

To some extent, the same easy availability obtains in the twenty-six foreign countries where AA has gained a foothold. This is especially true of the nations of the British Commonwealth, particularly Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which together list more AA members than the whole movement could boast nine years ago; and of the Scandinavian countries, where membership is fairly strong. At a recent AA banquet in Oslo, Norway, 400 members celebrated their deliverance, drinking nothing stronger than water. Throughout Scandinavia the members bolster the program by using Antibus, the new European aversion drug. This practice is deplored by some AA members as showing a lack of faith in the standard AA program, but, of course, nothing is done, or can be done, about it, since the program is free to anyone who thinks he needs it and he may adapt it in any way that suits him.

More often than not, though, disregard of the standard admonitions backfires. A bibulous Scottish baronet found this out when, returning from London, where he caught

the spark from a local group, he set out ambitiously to dry up Edinburgh, a hard-drinking town. But he tried it by remote control, so to speak, hiring a visiting American AA to do the heavy work. This violated the principle that the arrested drunk must do drunk-rescuing work himself in order to remain sober. Besides, the Scottish drunks wouldn't listen to a hired foreign pleader. In no time at all, and without getting a convert, the baronet and his hireling were swacked to the eyeballs and crying on each other's shoulders. After the American had gone home the baronet stiffened up, abandoned the traditions of his class and started all over again, cruising the gutters himself, visiting drunks in their homes and in hospitals and prisons. Edinburgh is now in the of win column, and there are also groups in Glasgow, Dundee, Perth and Campbeltown, all offshoots of Edinburgh.

Alcoholism on a large scale seems to be most common in highly complex civilizations. These tend to breed the neuroses of which uncontrolled drinking is just one outward expression. A man in a more primitive setting, bound closely to earthy tasks and the constant battle with Nature, is apt to again. It is treat his frustrations by ignoring them or by working them off.

Alcoholics Anonymous has nevertheless caught on in some out-of-the-way places. A liquor salesman for a British firm, who was seduced by his own merchandise, started a group in Cape Town, South Africa, which now has ninety members. There are also groups in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Durban and East London, and in Salisbury and Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia. The group at Anchorage, Alaska, which started in a blizzard, has a dozen-members, including one slightly puzzled Eskimo, and there are small groups in Palmer and Ketchikan. There is a small group in his the leper colony at Molokai, nurtured by AAs from Honolulu, who fly there occasionally and conduct meetings.

The figures perhaps give too rosy a picture of the turbulent little world of Alcoholics Anonymous. Most of the a members of any standing seem to be exceptionally happy people, with more the serenity of manner than most non-alcoholics are able to muster these jittery days; it is difficult to believe that they ever lived in the drunk's bewitched world. But some are still vaguely unhappy, though sober, and feel as if they were walking a tight wire. Treasurers occasionally disappear with funds and wind up, boiled, in another town. After this had happened a few times, groups were advised to keep the kitty low, and the practice now is to spend any appreciable surplus on a cake-and-coffee festival or picnic. This advice does not always work out; last year the members of a fresh and vigorous French-Canadian unit in Northern Maine, taking the advice to heart, debated so violently about how to spend their fifty-four dollars that all hands were drunk within 24 whole series of rebuffs. It is difficult at first for the recruit to achieve serenity.

As most groups are mixtures of men and women, a certain number of unconventional love affairs occur. More than one group has been thrown into a maelstrom of gossip and disorder by a determined lady whose alcoholism was complicated by an aggressive romantic instinct. Such complications are no more frequent than they are at the average country club; they merely stand out more baldly, and do more harm, in an emotionally explosive society. Special AA groups in 66 prisons around the nation are constantly trickling out graduates into the civilian groups. The ex-convicts are welcomed and are, for some reason, usually models of good behavior. A sanitarium or mental hospital background causes no more stir in an AA group than a string of college degrees would at the University Club; the majority of AAs are alumni of anywhere from one to fifty such institutions. Thus Alcoholics Anonymous is something of a Grand Hotel.

The ability of the arrested drunk to talk the active drunk's language convincingly is the one revolutionary aspect of the AA technique, and it does much to explain why the approach so often succeeds after other have failed. The rest of the technique is a synthesis of already existing ideas, some of which have centuries old. Once a community of language and experience has been established, it acts as a bridge over which the rest of the AA message can be conveyed, provided the subject is receptive.

Across the bridge and inside the active alcoholics' mind lies an exquisitely tortured microcosm, and a steady member of Alcoholics Anonymous gets a shudder every time he looks into it again. It is a rat-cage world, kept hot by alcohol flame, and within it lives, or dances, a peculiarly touchy, defiant, and grandiose personality.

There is a sage saying in AA that "an alcoholic is just like a normal person, only more so." He is egotistical, childish, resentful, and intolerant to an exaggerated degree. How he gets that way is endlessly debated, but a certain rough pattern is discernible in most cases. Many of those who ultimately become alcoholics start off as an only child, or as the youngest child in a family, or as a child with too solicitous a mother, or a father with an over-severe concept of discipline. When such a child begins getting his lumps from society, his ego begins to swell disproportionately – either from too easy triumphs or, as compensation, from being rebuffed in his attempts to win the approval of his contemporaries.

He develops an intense power drive, a feverish struggle to gain acceptance of himself at his own evaluation. A few of the power-drive boys meet with enough frustrations to send them into problem drinking while still in college or even while in high school. More often, on entering adult life, the prospective alcoholic is outwardly just about like anyone else his age, except that he is probably a little more cocky and aggressive, a little more hipped on the exhibitionistic charm routine, a little more plausible. He becomes a social drinker – that is, one who can stop after a few cocktails and enjoy the experience.

But at some place along the line his power drive meets up with an obstacle it cannot surmount – someone he loves refuses to love him, someone whose admiration he covets rejects him, some business or professional ambition is thwarted. Or he may encounter a whole series of rebuffs. The turning point may come quickly or it may be delayed for as long as 40 or 50 years. He begins to take his drinks in gulps, and before he realizes it he is off on a reeler. He loses jobs through drunkenness, embarrasses his family and alienates his friends. His world begins to shrink. He encounters the horrors of the “black-out,” the dawn experience of being unable to remember what he did the night before— how many checks he wrote and how large they were, whom he insulted, where he parked his car, whether or not he ran down someone on the way home. In the alcoholic world a nice distinction is made between the “black-out” and the simple “pass-out,” the latter being the relatively innocuous act of falling asleep from taking too much liquor. He jumps nervously whenever the doorbell or telephone rings, fearing that it may be a saloonkeeper with a rubber check, or a damage-suit lawyer, or the police.

He is frustrated and fearful, but is only vaguely conscious that his will, which is strong in most crises, fails him where liquor is concerned, although this is apparent to anyone who knows him. He nurses a vision of sobriety and tries all kind of self-rationing systems, none of which works for long. The great paradox of his personality is that in the midst of his troubles, his already oversize ego tends to expand; failure goes to his head. He continues, as the old saying has it, to rage through life calling for the headwaiter. In his dreams he is likely to see himself alone on a high mountain, masterfully surveying the world below. This dream, or some variant of it, will come to him whether he is sleeping in his own bed, or in a twenty-five-dollar-a-day hotel suite, or on a park bench, or in a psychopathic ward.

If he applies to Alcoholics Anonymous for help, he has taken an important step toward arresting his drink habit; he has at least admitted that alcohol has whipped him. This in itself is an act of humility, and his life thereafter must be a continuing effort to acquire more of this ancient virtue. Should he need hospitalization, his new friends will see that he gets it, if a local hospital will take him. Understandably, many hospitals are reluctant to accept alcoholic patients, because so many of them are disorderly. With this sad fact in mind, the society has persuaded several hospitals to set up separate alcoholic corridors and is helping to supervise the patients through supplying volunteer workers.

To the satisfaction of all concerned, including the hospital managements, which find the supervised corridors peaceful, more than 10,000 patients have gone through five-day rebuilding courses. The hospitals involved in this successful experiment are: St. Thomas' (Catholic) in Akron, St. John's (Episcopal) in Brooklyn and Knickerbocker (nonsectarian) in Manhattan. They have set a pattern which the society would like to see adopted by the numerous hospitals which now accept alcoholics on a more restricted basis.

Early in the game the newcomer is subjected to a merciful but thorough deflating of his ego. It is brought home to him forcefully that if he continues his uncontrolled drinking—the only kind he is capable of—he will die prematurely, or go insane from brain impairment, or both. He is encouraged to apologize to persons he has injured through his drunken behavior; this is a further step in the ego-deflation process and is often as painful to the recipient of the apology as it is to the neophyte AA. He is further instructed that unless he will acknowledge the existence of a power greater than himself and continually ask this power for help, his campaign for sobriety will probably fail. This is the much-discussed spiritual element in Alcoholics Anonymous. Most members refer to this power as God; some agnostic members prefer to call it Nature, or the Cosmic Power, or by some other label. In any case, it is the key of the AA program, and it must be taken not on a basis of mere acceptance or acknowledgment, but of complete surrender.

This surrender is described by a psychiatrist, Dr. Harry M. Tiebout, of Greenwich, Connecticut, as a “conversion” experience, “a psychological event in which there is a major shift in personality manifestation.” He adds: “The changes which take place in the conversion process may be summed up by saying that the person who has achieved the positive frame of mind has lost his tense, aggressive, demanding, conscience-ridden self which feels isolated and at odds with the world, and has become, instead, a relaxed, natural, more realistic individual who can dwell in the world on a live-and-let-live basis.”

The personality change wrought by surrender is far from complete, at first. Elated by a few weeks of sobriety, the new member often enters what is known as the “Chautauqua phase” — he is always making speeches at business meetings on what is wrong with the society and how these defects can be remedied. Senior members let him talk himself out of this stage of behavior; if that doesn’t work, he may break away and form a group of his own. If he does this, he gradually becomes a quiet veteran himself and other Chautauqua-phase boys either oust him from leadership of his own group or break away themselves and form a new group. By this and other processes of fission the movement spreads. It can stand a lot of outstanding foolishness and still grow.

Drunks, as such, are too individualistic to be organized, and there is no top command in Alcoholics Anonymous to excommunicate, fine or otherwise penalize irrational behavior. However, services—such as publishing meeting bulletins, distributing literature, arranging for hospitalization, and so on — are organized in the larger centers. The local offices, which are operated and financed by the groups thereabouts, are autonomous. They are governed by representatives elected by the neighborhood groups to a rotating body called the Inter-group. There are no dues; all local expenses are met by a simple passing of the hat at group meetings.

A certain body of operational traditions has grown up over the years, and charged with maintaining them— by exhortation only — is something called the Alcoholic Foundation, which has offices at 415 Lexington Avenue, New York City. For a foundation it acts queerly about money; much of its time is consumed in turning down proffered donations and bequests. One tradition is that AA must be kept poor, as money represents power and the society prefers to avoid the temptations which power brings. As a check on the foundation itself, the list of trustees is weighted against the alcoholics by eight to seven. The nonalcoholic members are two doctors, a sociologist, a magazine editor, a newspaper editor, a penologist, an international lawyer and a retired businessman.

Preserving the principle of anonymity is one of the more touchy tasks of the foundation. Members are not supposed to be anonymous among their friends or business acquaintances, but they are when appearing before the public—in print or on radio or television, for example—as members of Alcoholics Anonymous. This limited anonymity is considered important to the welfare of the movement, primarily because it encourages members to subordinate their personalities to the principles of AA. There is also the danger that if a member becomes publicized as a salvaged alcoholic he may stage a spectacular skid and injure the prestige of the society. Actually, anonymity has been breached only a few dozen times since the movement began, which isn't a bad showing, considering the exhibitionistic nature of the average alcoholic.

By one of the many paradoxes which have characterized its growth, Alcoholics Anonymous absorbed the “keep it poor” principle from one of the world's wealthiest men, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. The society was formed in 1935 after a fortuitous meeting in Akron between a Wall Street broker and an Akron surgeon, both alcoholics of long standing. The broker, who was in Akron on a business mission, had kept sober for several months by jawing drunks — unsuccessfully — but his business mission had fallen through and he was aching for a drink. The surgeon, at the time they got together, was quite blotto. Together, over a period of a few weeks, they kept sober and worked out the basic AA technique. By 1937, when they had about fifty converts they began thinking, as all new AAs will, of tremendous plans—for vast new alcoholic hospitals, squadrons of paid field workers and the literature of mercy pouring off immense presses. Being completely broke themselves, and being promoters at heart, as most alcoholics are, they set their sights on the Rockefeller jack pot.

Rockefeller sent an emissary to Akron to look into the phenomenon at work there, and, receiving a favorable report, granted an audience to a committee of eager-eyed alcoholics. He listened to their personal sagas of resurrection from the gutter and was deeply moved; in fact, he was ready to agree that the AAs had John Barleycorn by the throat. The visitors relaxed and visualized millions dropping into the till. Then the man with the big money bags punctured the vision. He said that too much money might be the ruination of any great moral movement and that he didn't want to be a party to

ruining this one. However, he did make a small contribution—small for Rockefeller — to tide it over for a few years, and he got some of his friends to contribute a few thousand more. When the Rockefeller money ran out, AA was self-supporting, and it has remained so ever since.

Although AA remains in essence what it has always been, many changes have come along in late years. For one thing, the average age of members has dropped from about forty-seven to thirty-five. The society is no longer, as it was originally, merely a haven for the “last gaspers.” Because of widespread publicity about alcoholism, alcoholics are discovering earlier what their trouble is.

As AA has achieved wider social acceptance, more women are coming in than ever before. Around the country they average 15 per cent of total membership; in New York, where social considerations never did count for much, the AAs are 30 per cent women. The unmarried woman alcoholic is slow to join, as she generally gets more coddling and protection from her family than a man does; she is what is known in alcoholic circles as a “bedroom drinker.” The married-woman alcoholic has a tougher row to hoe. The wife of an alcoholic, for temperamental and economic reasons, will ordinarily stick by her erring husband to the bitter end. The husband of an alcoholic wife, on the other hand, is usually less; a few years of suffering are enough to drive him to the divorce court, with the children in tow. Thus the divorced-woman AA is a special problem, and her progress in sobriety depends heavily upon the kindness shown her by the other AA women. For divorcees, and for other women who may be timid about speaking out in mixed meetings, special female auxiliary groups have been formed in some communities. They work out better than a cynic might think.

Another development is the growth of the sponsor system. A new member gets a sponsor immediately, and it is the function of the sponsor to accompany him to meetings, to see that he gets all the help he needs and to be on call at any time for emergencies. As an emergency usually amounts only to an onset of that old feeling for a bottle, it is customarily resolved by a telephone conversation, although it may involve an after-midnight trip to Ernie’s gin mill, whither the neophyte has been shanghaied by a couple of unregenerate old drinking companions. As the membership of AA cuts through all social, occupational and economic classes, it is possible to match the sponsor with the sponsored, and this seems to speed up the arrestive process.

During the past decade or so, the society, whose original growth was in large cities, has strongly infiltrated the grass-roots country. Its arrival in this sector was delayed largely because of the greater stigma, which attaches to alcoholism in the small town. Because of this stigma and the effect it has on his business, professional or social standing, the small-town alcoholic, reveling in his delusion that nobody knows about his drinking—when actually it is the gossip of Main Street — takes frequent “vacations” or “business

trips” if he can afford it. He or she — the banker, the storekeeper, the lawyer, the madam president of the garden club, sometimes even the clergyman — is actually headed for a receptive hospital or clinic in the nearest large city, where no one will recognize him.

The pattern of small-town growth begins when the questing small-towner seeks out the big-city AA outfit and its message catches on with him. To his surprise, he finds that half a dozen drinkers in towns near his own have also been to the fount. On returning to his home, he gets in touch with them and they form an inter-town group; or there may be enough drinkers in his own town to begin a group. Though there is a stigma even to getting sober in small towns, it is less virulent than the souse stigma, and word of the movement spreads throughout the county and into adjoining counties. The churches and newspapers take it up and beat the drum for it; relatives of drunks, and doctors who find themselves unable to help their alcoholic patients, gladly unload the problem cases on AA, or AA is glad to get them. The usually intra-fellowship quarrel over who is going to run the thing inevitably develops and there are factional splits, but the splits help to spread the movement, too, and all the big quarrels soon become little ones, and then disappear.

Nowhere is Alcoholics anonymous carried on with more enthusiasm than in Los Angeles. Unlike most localities, which try to keep separate group membership small, for easier handling, Los Angeles likes the theatrical mass meeting setting, with 1000 or more present. The Los Angeles AAs carry their membership as if it were a social cachet and go in strongly for square dances of their own. Jewelry bearing the AA monogram, though frowned upon elsewhere, is popular on the Coast. After three months of certified sobriety a member receives a bronze pin; after one year he is entitled to have a ruby chip inserted in the pin and, after three years, a diamond chip. Rings bearing the AA letters are widely worn, as well as similarly embellished compacts, watch fobs and pocket pieces.

Texas takes AA with enthusiasm too. In the ranch sector, members drive or fly hundreds of miles to attend AA square dances and barbecues, bringing their families. In metropolitan areas, such as Dallas-Fort Worth — there are upwards of a dozen oil-millionaire members here — fancy club quarters have been established in old mansions and the brethren and large families rejoice, dance, and drink coffee, and soda pop amid expensive furnishings. One Southwestern group recently got its governor to release a life-terminer from the state penitentiary for a weekend, so that he could be the guest of honor of the group. “We have a large open meeting,” a local member wrote a friend elsewhere in the country, “and many state and country officials attended in order to hear from Herman (the lifer) had to tell about AA within the walls. They were deeply impressed and very interested. The next night I gave a lawn party and buffet supper in

Herman's honor, with about 50 AAs present. This was the first occasion of this kind in the state and to our knowledge the first in the United States."

Some AAs believe that this group carried the joy business too far. Others think that each section of the country ought to manifest spirit in its own way; anyway, that is the way it usually works out. The Midwest is businesslike and serious. In the Deep South the AAs do a certain amount of Bible reading and hymn singing. The Northwest and the upper Pacific Coast help support their gathering places with the proceeds from slot machines. New York, a catchall for screwballs and semi-screwballs from all over, is pious about gambling, and won't have it around the place. New England is temperate in its approach, and its spirit is characterized by the remark of one Yankee who, writing a fellow AA about a lake cottage he had just bought, said, "The serenity hangs in great gobs from the trees."

The serene mind is what AAs the world over are driving toward, and an epigrammatic expression of their goal is embodied in a quotation which members carry on cards in their wallets and plaster up on the walls of their meeting rooms: "God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, courage to change things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

Originally thought in Alcoholics Anonymous to have been written by St. Francis of Assisi, it turned out, on recent research, to have been the work of another eminent non-alcoholic. Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, of Union Theological Seminary. Dr. Niebuhr was amused on being told of the use to which his prayer was being put. Asked if it was original with him, he said he thought it was, but added, "Of course, it may have been spooking around for centuries."

Alcoholics Anonymous seized upon it in 1940, after it had been used as a quotation in the New York Herald Tribune. The fellowship was late in catching up with it; and it will probably spook around a good deal longer before the rest of the world catches up with it.

"The Drunkard's Best Friend" by Jack Alexander, *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 1, 1950