

December 1944

Dear Mother of "J." I cannot tell how poignantly I am stirred by the letter you wrote *The Grapevine* about your alcoholic son.

Just ten years ago my own mother, after years of frantic bewilderment, lost hope. Long a problem drinker, I had come to the jumping off place. A very good doctor had pronounced the grim sentence: "Obsessive drinker, deteriorating rapidly - hopeless."

The doctor used to talk about my case somewhat like this: "Yes, Bill has underlying personality defects....great emotional sensitivity, childishness and inferiority.

"This very real feeling of inferiority is magnified by his childish sensitivity and it is this state of affairs which generates in him that insatiable, abnormal craving for self approval and success in the eyes of the world. Still a child, he cries for the moon. And the moon, it seems, won't have him!

"Discovering alcohol, he found much more in it than do normal folks. To him alcohol is no mere relaxation; it means release - release from inner conflict. It seems to set his troubled spirit free."

The doctor would then go on, "Seen this way, we normal people can picture how such a compulsive habit can become a real obsession; as indeed it has, in Bill's case. Once he arrived at the obsession point, alcohol overshadows all else. Hence he now appears utterly

selfish. And immoral. He will lie, cheat, steal or what have you, to serve his drinking ends. Of course those about him are shocked and dismayed because they think his actions are wilful. But that's far from being so. The real picture of Bill is that he is a bankrupt idealist; one who has gone broke on vain, childish dreams of perfection and power. Victimized now by his obsession, he is a little boy crying alone in a dark strange room; waiting agonized for mother - or God - to come and light a candle."

I must confess, Mother of "J", that I may have put some of these words into the doctor's mouth. But that's the alcoholic's life as I have lived it.

Did I, an alcoholic, have a defective character? Of course I did. Was I, an alcoholic, also a sick man? Yes, very.

To what extent was I personally responsible for my drinking, I don't know. Yet I'm not one to take a complete refuge in the idea that I was a sick man only. In earlier years I certainly had some degree of free will. That free will I used badly, to the great misery of my mother and countless others. I am deeply ashamed.

As one who knows me a little, you may have heard how, ten years ago, a friend himself a liberated alcoholic, came to me bearing *the light* which finally led me out of the toils.

There will come a day like that for you and yours - I'm so confident!

As ever, *Bill W.*