

Epic Gathering Marks Tenth Anniversary

Symbolizing the unity of A.A., over 2,500 members of the fellowship and their friends from 36 states, two Canadian provinces, and Mexico gathered in Cleveland's Music Hall on June 10 to commemorate and pay tribute to Bill W. and Dr. Bob on the 10th anniversary of the founding of the movement.

Held under the sponsorship of Greater Cleveland's 44 groups, the near capacity Music Hall audience heard Bill and Dr. Bob characterize the gathering as an unprecedented outpouring of the grace of God; heard them strike a keynote of gratitude, humility, unity, and simplicity "born on that wave of destiny that comes out of Heaven itself."

Entertained Saturday (June 9) afternoon and evening by five Cleveland open house group meetings, parties, and a tea, a thousand from the historic Music Hall meeting (Sunday afternoon) later dined at the Carter Hotel to conclude the first glorious decade of A.A....sober, grateful, happy, united.

Inspired in his address to the largest crowd of A.A.'s ever assembled in one place, Bill, who preceded Dr. Bob on the program, traced the development of A.A. He voiced the hope that A.A. would always remain simple....that while we were quite settled on the fundamentals of the movement, the process for seeking an answer to the question, "What kind of society is this?" was still evolving...that "the problems of A.A. are the touchstones of our progress."

Dr. Bob, in turn, expressed his gratitude for the divine source of strength on which we all may call and receive...for the meeting with Bill in Akron "made under divine guidance"....for the selected human agency that caused that meeting....for all of the people who in the early days of and before A.A., "were a source of help and inspiration in my trouble"...for his pastor and the ladies of A.A., and Anne, his wife who shared with him a common interest, and without whose cooperative spirit "I would not have maintained my sobriety"....for those A.A.s of Cleveland who took the time and trouble to come to Akron while the fellowship was still young...for the members of The Alcoholic Foundation who have met once a month "for roughly eight years without compensation"...for having acquired a wealth of returned and new-found friends...for those at the Music Hall whose presence "gives us an added incentive to be more cooperative and helpful to each other."

Bill voiced a final tribute to Dr Bob in the same vein of joyous thankfulness when he said, "Although we have had many differences, we have never had an angry word."

Concluding with the thought that there never was a real beginning of A.A...."This could not have been but for others," Bill opened his Music Hall talk with a brief re-telling of how he had been condemned by an eminent New York psychiatrist to die unless he stopped drinking....how a few months later an old

friend appeared with the news he was suffering from an illness not only of the mind, emotions, and body, but of the soul...how he had discovered from his friend he had been living his life on a demand basis...how he would have to lose his life in order to find it.

Honesty First

This friend, Bill explained, showed him he would have to become honest with himself...he would have to make peace with his fellow man...he would have to envision and live a new kind of giving - the kind which demands no return.

Shortly after, Bill continued, he found himself in the hospital again, where, in a deep depression he finally called on the God against Whom he had always rebelled, to show Himself. "Release came. And with it a new sense of freedom filled my being," Bill quietly said. "It was as simple as that."

Following this spiritual experience, Bill told how subtle conceits soon entered his life. Laughingly he recounted how "I set out to sober up all the drunks in the world. I was determined every drunk should have his hot flash."

Without a single convert six months later, Bill found himself in Akron on business where, following a bitter disappointment, he was faced with a wave of self-pity.

"For the first time I realized," Bill explained, "I needed to talk to a drunk just as much as the drunk needed to talk to me." Whereupon the "strange chain of

circumstances" unfolded which culminated in Bill and Doc's meeting...the random selection of the minister's name....the long list of people who failed to respond....the final spark in Henrietta S....the eventual meeting with Dr. Bob after a mother's Day bender.

"Something passed between us," Bill stated. And a "beginning greater than either one of us was made."

A Word for Anonymity

Back-tracking from the present, Bill talked briefly on how the book was written four years after his meeting with Dr. Bob...how he considers himself not its author but the umpire for all of the contributors to it...how from literally scores of suggestions it was titled "Alcoholics Anonymous" instead of "The Way Out" (there were 13 books that had been published, called 'The Way Out' and that was not only too many, but unlucky," Bill smiled)...how there have always been in A.A. differences of opinion over our anonymity, and how most of the "older folk" hope that it is kept unless there is some "very grave or good reason to the contrary," adding that "to be truly adult in this is to be modest"...how there is a fortunate absence of a "professional class" in A.A.

Nor is A.A. without its "sins," Bill pointed out. Not the least of which, he explained, were those A.A.s, often including himself, who "viewed with alarm the A.A. movement and the problems within it." Citing a personal experience wherein he was derelict in his

responsibility, he also deplored the frequent neglect of the new man and the failure in some instances to give him his shot at A.A. In this regard, he referred to the excellent sponsorship system in Cleveland, urging closer inspection for those interested in well-conceived 12th step work.

Currently, Bill concluded, there's the problem of leadership despite claims there are no leaders nor elected officers....the problems of remuneration for A.A. secretaries, janitors, and all those falling in this area of special functions. On this latter matter, Bill voiced the feeling that spiritual activity was never paid for, although functional activity, just as everywhere, was.

While on leadership, Bill said, he regarded a leader as one who has learned to love the best in men; one who has worked at the program; one who has stayed sober; one who has come to the realization that "A.A. is much bigger than any of us," and, as a result of that realization, has stepped aside for others to share the limelight. As for himself, Bill humorously finished, he and Dr. Bob look upon themselves as purely "a couple of old, cracked antiques who have had a little more experience than others."

Dr. Bob's Reasons

Dr. Bob, in a different vein, indicated we need to follow the steps in our program as long as we live, particularly himself. For he realizes, he said, he has the best reason except Bill for not taking a drink...his 10 years of

sobriety. And, he stated, "I most certainly don't care to get tight any more."

"Blindly groping for the truth," Dr. Bob continued, "the early development of the activity in Akron was not easy. It was mostly by the trial and error method. We had no precedent whatsoever, gleaning a fact here and there as time went on. Eventually a generalized procedure was discovered with a reasonable hope of acceptance."

The religious group to whom he had gone for help to solve his alcoholic problem, Dr. Bob went on, told him, "to bury the past and not visit the grave too often." Wryly, he commented...I want a faint recollection of the past - but not too faint."

Proceeding along a spiritual line, Dr. Bob told how we have all been taught to avoid religious discussion or argument. But he said that he has averaged at least an hour's reading each day for the past 10 years on some spiritual subject. However, he hastened to say, he has always returned to the simple teachings of The Sermon on the Mount; the Book of James and the 13th Chapter of Corinthians in The Bible for his fundamentals.

Man's Triumvirate

Stating that the A.A. program is not an intellectual program, Dr. Bob talked of the three divisions of man - the physical man, the mental man and the spiritual man. And he uttered the hope that he was developing into a well-integrated individual.

"Because the spiritual search is a long search and requires unrelenting effort," Dr. Bob said, he has attempted to acquire a satisfactory understanding of the teachings of The Bible.

On the Twelve Steps, he stated they've been alive for seven years. And that there's been no suggestion of a change in them. Furthermore, he hopes there will not be a change, unless they can be bettered.

Some of them, he pointed out, interfere with our personal schedules. "And we sometimes feel we don't need all of them - although there has never been a protracted success with a modified program."

"So we's better accept it in its entirety," Dr. Bob advised. "For John Barleycorn's a tireless and relentless instructor. Today, thousands of people are sober because they've followed the program."

Winding up his remarks, Doc indicated that "our program must be followed by each individual. And each individual is the only one who can do it for himself. Let none of us ever forget - love and service keep us dry...love for our Father and our neighbours...love, through service, in never refusing our aid to anyone."

John J. Cleveland, Ohio