

January 1951



and thousands came...

As he returned to his seat on the platform, those who watched could easily see that the exertion of saying the brief words of counsel had left him physically weak and spent. Try as he would, he was forced to leave after a few moments. In consternation thousands of eyes followed him as he left the stage.

He was driven back to Akron, that afternoon by a friend. As Dr. Bob was helped into the automobile, he seemed physically very near complete exhaustion. As they drove the thirty odd miles from Cleveland to Akron, some inner strength seemed to revive Dr. Bob so that by the time they drove up to his home he was almost his old self. The man who seemed on the point of collapse only an hour before, said "Well, if I'm going to be ready to go to Vermont next week, I'd better be about it."

Shortly after the Conference, he did go to Vermont. Dr. Bob, his

son and his daughter-in-law, drove, in the sedan, to his boyhood home, where he visited old friends for the last time ...and worried all the time for fear the convertible would not be comfortable for Emma and her husband to drive on their long vacation trip... "Should've taken it myself..."

Upon his return home, he was admitted into St. Thomas hospital for a minor operation... one of so many that had come during the last years. Then home to Emma's good cooking and rest.

In November, his doctors found it advisable to perform another of the minor operations. This time, he went to City Hospital, where in 1910 he had come as an interne and where later, he and Bill had talked to "the third man." On Wednesday, November 15, a day after the operation, an old friend called and spoke to him. "Why, I'm just fine Abercrombie, just fine..."

Close to noontime on Thursday, November 16, 1950, he was resting. The nurse in attendance stood by his bed, watching...waiting for any change that might come. Dr. Bob, M.D., lifted his hand to the light... with professional calm he studied the color... with a final confirming glance, he spoke... "You had better call the family... this is it..."

—so reconciled with his brothers, he placed his gifts upon the altar and went his way...

*From Dr. Walter F. Tunks,
the man who answered
the telephone...*

EULOGY

TODAY we are paying our respects to the memory of a friend whose name and influence have extended around the world. A phrase of St. Paul's well describes him; "As unknown, yet well known." Affectionately we called him Doctor Bob — and thousands who never knew him are greatly in his debt. Dr. Bob would not want us to hang any haloes around him. He would ask us, rather, to carry on the work in which he had so influential a part. There is no need for me to tell you the story of his life. It is well known to any who are familiar with the work of Alcoholics Anonymous, of which he was a co-founder.

Let me merely point out how often in history God has used human weakness to demonstrate his redeeming power. Next to Jesus, no one has influenced human history more than St. Paul. Who was

he? He was the chief persecutor of the Christian Church. He had stood by and watched young Stephen stoned, with never a word of protest. Then one day God caught up with him, turned him straight around in his tracks and Saul the persecutor became Paul the Apostle and chief defender of Christianity. Had you and I been living in the fourth century near the city of Carthage, we might have heard of the escapades of a fast living young man named Augustine. He was lecherous and profligate and all but broke his saintly mother's heart, though Monica's prayers for him never ceased. Then one day as he walked in the garden, he heard a voice which said to him, "Tolle, Lege" — Take, Read - and, opening the Bible at random, he came upon this passage: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us, therefore, cast off the works of

darkness and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye in the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." So a man was re-born, and Augustine the dissolute, became St. Augustine, one of the most prominent leaders in the Christian Church.

You know the story of Dr. Bob's weakness. Then something happened to him that profoundly changed his life and that of thousands of others who shared the same weakness. In a desperate hour, he and Bill turned to God for help they couldn't find anywhere else, and Alcoholics Anonymous

was born. By Dr. Bob's side was a brave and understanding wife whom we laid to rest last year. With wisdom and patience, she helped, guide the AA group in its early days and never ceased to be a power for good. And now Bob has gone to be with the one he loved so much.

Here is the lesson of his life. God can use human weakness to demonstrate his power. No man need stay the way he is. With God's help he can throw off the chains of any enslaving habit and be free again to be what God wants him to be. His monument is not the money he left in the bank, but the gratitude in the hearts of so many men and women who own more than they can ever repay to his example.

O GOD we thank Thee for the life and service of Thy dear servant, Doctor Bob, whom we remember at Thy altar this day. Bless and prosper the work of Alcoholics Anonymous, in whose founding he played such an all important part. Prosper the work of this organization that it may reclaim the lives of many who are ashamed of their own weakness. This we ask in the name of Him who taught us that no failure ever need be final — our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Hail and Farewell ...

It is such a little while ago he stood before us,
sick unto death and strong unto faith ...
Strong still unto the task begun ...
Firm still, and he spoke in a strong, sure voice
Ten minutes. How many thousand times ten minutes
Had he served ten times ten thousands of us who were
halt, and sick, and steeped in fear?
And in ten minutes there again were strengths anew,
and old truths reaffirmed
In the strong, sure voice... in the tired, frail body.
How far from St. Thomas house of healing in Akron
To the surging conclave of Cleveland?
In miles as far as the Marshall isles are far;
As near as the first lengthening step of one drunk taking
one clear stride forward,
And as far as fifteen years are far, and as near as one
new ray of hope in one new breast.
The little man who had sworn Hippocrates great oath
Had helped to heal beyond it.
*This be the arch of his memorial: the towering span
Of Fellowship, held high upon the heritage
By which we grow.
And this be the echo of his founding voice:
The weakest knock of whosoever seeks
The opening
Of any AA door...*