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From AA's Scrapbooks: 1940

FOLLOWING THE EXTRAORDINARY WAVE of publicity occasioned by the Rockefeller dinner in February of 1940, AA became the darling of the columnists and the delight of the press. From Beatrice Fairfax to Edwin C. Hill, from sob-sister to sober political pundit, poured out the story of Alcoholics Anonymous.

At this time the tone of our subsequent fine press relations was already evident. In all of these literally millions of words of copy reporting and recommending this new movement, the greatest respect was given to the principle of anonymity, and with few exceptions AA was accorded serious and accurate representation.

The majority of the reporters, feature writers and columnists attended meetings and wrote with the freshness and enthusiasm of immediate knowledge. Typical of the publicity of the times is the following from Howard Vincent O'Brian's column in the Chicago Daily News, dated April 30, 1940:

"Some of these people I have known a long time. I know what they once were and what they are now. Something has happened to them. I do not know what this something is. That is to say I cannot weigh it, or measure it, or define it in words. That doesn't matter. I have passed the stage of wanting to 'explain.' I am content with reporting what I see and hear. Perhaps when I recover from the awe of what I saw and heard last night (at an AA meeting) I may have a go at an explanation but I doubt it."

Also about this time the Houston Press published a series of six articles by an AA newspaper man who had drunk himself out of even that hard-drinking profession. This series became the basis of the first AA pamphlet published by the Works Publishing Company in April of 1940. The pamphlet is historically fascinating as contrast to the vast amount of literature now available about AA. It modestly claims 500 members and announces "firm" groups in Akron, Cleveland and New York City, with "vigorous beginnings in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Kansas City, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington, D. C., Richmond, and Houston." The total contents of our first AA pamphlet consisted of: the reprint series from the Houston Press, another reprint by Dr. Silkworth from a Minneapolis medical journal, and the Twelve Suggested Steps.

Every time AA was mentioned in the press, even if it was only the story of the founding of a new group in a local area, the publication was besieged with inquiries. In most cases a follow-up article resulted, relating the astonished satisfaction of the editors at