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HEALTH GROUP HONORS ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1951 Lasker Award Presented For "Distinguished Service" by
American Public Health Association

CHOSEN for the conspicuous honor by the American Public Health Association, Alcoholics Anonymous has been formally presented with one of the highly significant Lasker awards for 1951 - "in recognition of its unique and highly successful approach" to an "age-old public health and social problem."

The presentation, made in San Francisco on October 30, took place in that city's famous War Memorial Opera House, the same distinguished setting which surrounded the birth of the United Nations and the Japanese Peace Treaty. The award is one of the eight made possible each year through benefactions of Mary and Albert Lasker, New York philanthropists, and was presented during the recent A.P.H.A. convention held in the California city.

On the previous night, October 29th, AA conducted its own ceremonies in the Opera House, as an expression of gratitude to the donors of the award and to the association which designated AA for the sig-

nal honor — a tribute all the more appreciated because it was directed at a lay group instead of the professional individuals and organizations which are traditional recipients of the Lasker awards. This preliminary session was attended by some 3,000 AAs, their families, by doctors, public health experts, clergymen and leading citizens. Speakers on this more intimate program were Bill W. and Bernard Smith—the latter, as non-alcoholic chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation, also receiving the prized testimonial the following night on behalf of Alcoholics Anonymous.

At the presentation, when the A.P.H.A. had 1,500 AAs and their families as guests, Bill and Bernard were seated on the platform which held, besides high officials of the association and other distinguished speakers, Governor Earl Warren, of California, and Mayor Elmer E. Robinson, of San Francisco.

The symbol of this recognition is a silver statuette — a small replica of the Winged Victory of Samothrace - signifying the triumphs of AA over the death and disease so long harvested by the ravages of alcohol.

The A.P.H.A. citation which was read at the ceremony used these words:

"The American Public Health Association presents a Lasker award for 1951 to Alcoholics Anonymous, in recognition of its unique and highly successful approach to that age-old public health and social problem, alcoholism.

"Since its founding sixteen years ago, Alcoholics Anonymous has brought recovery to more than 120,000 chronic drinkers formerly thought hopeless. Today this world fellowship of 4,000 groups, resident in 38 countries, is rehabilitating 25,000 additional persons yearly. In emphasizing alcoholism as an illness, the social stigma associated with this condition is being blotted out.

"Alcoholics Anonymous works upon the novel principle that a recovered alcoholic can reach and treat a fellow-sufferer as no one else can. In so doing, the recovered alcoholic maintains his own sobriety; the man he treats soon becomes a physician to the next applicant, thus creating an ever-expanding chain reaction of liberation, with patients welded together by bonds of common suffering, com-

mon understanding and stimulating action in a great cause.

"This is not a reform movement, nor is it operated by professionals who are concerned with the problem. It is financed by voluntary contributions of its members, all of whom remain anonymous. There are no dues, no paid therapists, no paid professional workers. It enjoys the good will and often the endorsement of many medical and scientific groups - no mean achievement in itself for an organization run entirely by laymen.

"Historians may one day point to Alcoholics Anonymous as a society which did far more than achieve a considerable measure of success with alcoholism and its stigma; they may recognize Alcoholics Anonymous to have been a great venture in social pioneering which forged a new instrument for social action, a new therapy based on the kinship of common suffering, one having a vast potential for the myriad other ills of mankind."

The actual inscription on the statuette reads like this:

"The Lasker Award - 1951. Presented by the American Public Health Association to Alcoholics Anonymous for pioneer work in successfully attacking the public health problem of alcoholism and, in so doing, developing a new social instrument which holds promise for other human ills."

After his brief acceptance, Bernard Smith introduced Bill W., who

added his own words of humble gratitude on behalf of AA.

The prelude - the night before the award — was arranged in all its details by the Northern California Council of AA. The session opened with the traditional moment of silence, followed by an invocation by Father Meagher, of St. Matthew's Catholic Church of San Mateo. Welcoming remarks were made by Jack I., of San Francisco, who told the invited delegates of the A.P.H.A. of the appreciation felt by all AAs for the eminent honor the association had announced.

Bill W., in his talk to this vanguard session, paid feeling tribute to the multitude of non-alcoholic friends who have helped AA on its way — and expressed specific gratitude to the newest increment of 13,000 supporters, the members of the A.P.H.A.

Bernard Smith; the revered Dr. William D. Silkworth; John D. Rockefeller and his son Nelson; Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick; Curtis Bok, of the famous Philadelphia Curtis

Publishing Company; Jack Alexander, author of the eye-opening original article in *The Saturday Evening Post*; Dr. Harry M. Tiebout; Fulton Oursler, the writer and editor, and — by no means least of all — Sister Ignatia, of St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, were among the many crusading "outsiders" whom Bill included in his credits for AA's 16-year career of expanding benefits. He listed all of the foregoing on the roster of AA's "founding fathers," reaching back 800 years to ecclesiastical history for still another: St. Francis of Assisi, who, said Bill, was author of the conviction that the movement should remain corporately poor, in order better to pursue its mission.

"AA has many founders," he concluded, "men of the cloth, men and women of medicine, members of the press. Their friendship climaxes here today as we embrace also the men and women of the American Public Health Association in our great family of friends — a great distinction and a great honor as well."

