

October 1960

Our Pioneers Overseas —

LET'S BACK THEM TO THE LIMIT



By Bill

I'VE just finished reading the printer's galley for this international number of our Grapevine. There are deeply stirring communications from South Africa, Northern Rhodesia and the Congo; from Japan, Indonesia, New Guinea, Tasmania, Australia; from Cuba, Trinidad and Jamaica; from Saudi Arabia and from West Germany, Denmark, Holland, Finland, Ireland, Scotland and England.

Yet this eye-arresting array of AA's overseas beachheads and bases reveals scarcely more than a quarter of our total activity in distant places and countries. Out on those far reaches there are hundreds of groups and thousands of fellow members. Our language of the heart is already spoken in perhaps a dozen tongues. This is the pioneering front of AA today.

We often speak of our loners, of our solitary groups, and of our several large centers abroad, as beachheads, bases and fronts. But in a very real sense these descriptions are misnomers. Though our AA loners and groups do live and do carry our message in many areas of danger and revolution, there is no evidence that they fear their surroundings; there is little sign that their presence in these hot spots is unwanted. Their entire non-aggressiveness, their single purpose of bringing a new light to all who suffer alcoholism, is perfectly clear. Theirs are beachheads for health and for faith, and this is for all to see.

Witness the AA gal who, on an errand

of peace, recently drove alone across the whole African continent and emerged unscathed; then think of those loners stationed in other areas of strife—how they continue to maintain their sobriety and struggle to start new groups; please remember the intense concern of the AA who felt he had failed a brother member who had committed suicide; ponder the good humor of the Middle East AA meeting as its members gather in a secret rendezvous lest the military authorities or some of our Mohammedan friends (who never drink!) might be offended. Consider, in these articles, the problems of those fast-growing overseas centers just now emerging from their pioneering time—how they have slowly gained the confidence of medicine, religion and the press; how they have finally grown into unity through an ever better application of our Twelve Traditions; how they have tried to make good their desperate lack of language translations; and how they have well begun to cross all barriers of race, creed or social condition. This, and more, can be read in and between these special lines which they have penned for this GV International Issue.

Beyond doubt, this exciting pioneering front of AA today brings great promise of a vast world-wide unfoldment for tomorrow. Our friends abroad well understand that this is no time for complacent relaxation: their letters eloquently portray their intense industry and dedication.

So then, what can We do—we here in North America?

Well, we can greatly increase the tempo of what we have been doing. Let's scan just a small sampling of our overseas projects:

Americans and Canadians alike are much traveled in these days. Therefore let each traveler remember that many a group abroad has been started by a voyaging AA like himself (or herself). We have a World Directory. Let all such messengers be supplied with this valuable means of communication. This can mean untold inspiration to the loner or the group to be found at many a destination.

Here, for instance, is a crying current need. As this GV goes to press, pandemonium has broken loose in Paris. One paper there is carrying a series of sensational pieces about AA in America. To say the least, that characteristic desire of the French to be dramatic has been going pretty far.

One of these articles describes my first meeting in 1934 with my own sponsor, Ebby. It displays a screaming headline about two inches high. Allegedly, I say over the phone: "*Come quickly, Ebby, I have gin!*" Despite this astounding and most comical distortion of our Twelfth Step approach, the French alkies are nevertheless flocking to the AA colors. Our tiny group at Paris is nearly swamped. Scarcely a one of them can speak French. So, AA travelers, there in Paris is your chance—especially if you can "parlez-vous!"

Then we have the men on ships, those Internationalists of ours. May their numbers and their dedication continue to grow. They have already planted and nurtured AA all over the world. To them we all exclaim, "May your plantings increase and may your harvests bulge the AA granaries!"

Now look into our efforts at GSO—AA's world headquarters. We can surely enlarge those overseas services. To eliminate the

distressing garble that has plagued many distant AA groups for years, we shall need to furnish far more and better translations of our basic literature. Sheer lack of an understanding of AA's Twelve Traditions has routinely created chaotic conditions in many a land. Even our book "Alcoholics Anonymous" has seen but two complete translations. In mimeograph form the bare text of the book can be read in only two more tongues. Of course this challenge has to be met, and very soon, we believe.

Our whole foreign department at New York headquarters must be enlarged. There is an urgent need for more staff work—which would mean far better communication with those abroad. Until recently, no overseas group had ever been visited by anyone from our world headquarters—excepting Lois and me. That visit was ten years ago. Of course we deeply hope that we can still make a few similar journeys. But even these, if made, could scarcely add up to the consistent personal contact that will one of these days be needed.

So, AAs in America, let us back our overseas pioneers to the limit. Without delay, let's back them with a still more lively understanding, with still more dedicated travelers, and with every bit of aid and information and inspiration that we can send to them across the waters. In this respect no single agency can do more than our world headquarters. Here all of us can participate. Here a few more contribution dollars can make an enormous difference—something that we shall be bound to remember every time the hat is specially passed for this great and unique service purpose.

I am sure that we shall soon press these and many more projects into a far higher gear. Then our pioneers beyond the seas will feel that they have something more than our interested approval and occasional help. They will know that our constant and unstinted love has become theirs—and theirs for keeps! (End)