

May 1951--Quebec



FRENCH WITHOUT TEARS

ONE of the joys of membership in AA in the Province of Quebec stems from the twofold and sober *Joie de vivre* of a bilingual civilization.

Tourist folders will tell you that Quebec contains the only walled city in North America; that it was from here that Ben Franklin was sent packing back to Philadelphia, and that pea soup, large families and handicrafts are, so to speak, the *specialites de la maison*

of French-Canada. From an AA point of view this is of mere academic interest. What is, or should be, noteworthy, is that in the AA international family today the Province of Quebec is the only spot where the principles of AA are as clearly understood, lived by, and acted upon by two peoples of divergent races and creeds, living, outside of national crises, as harmoniously as possible under the special circumstances of different

antecedents, cultures and aspirations.

There is evidence here again of that great AA "miracle." The Province of Quebec, a verdant island clinging to its age-old traditions in the face of the constant pressure of (to them) "foreign" traders from overseas and gee-whiz salesmen from across the 49th parallel, with all their attendant fanfare and propaganda, does not take easily or kindly to innovations in either the spiritual or material realms. That the AA gospel is reaching into the four corners of the Province, and the descendants of the hardy pioneers who settled New France, are finding La Paix from the inspired vision of two Anglo-Saxon Founding Fathers in Akron, Ohio, U.S.A., is The Miracle!

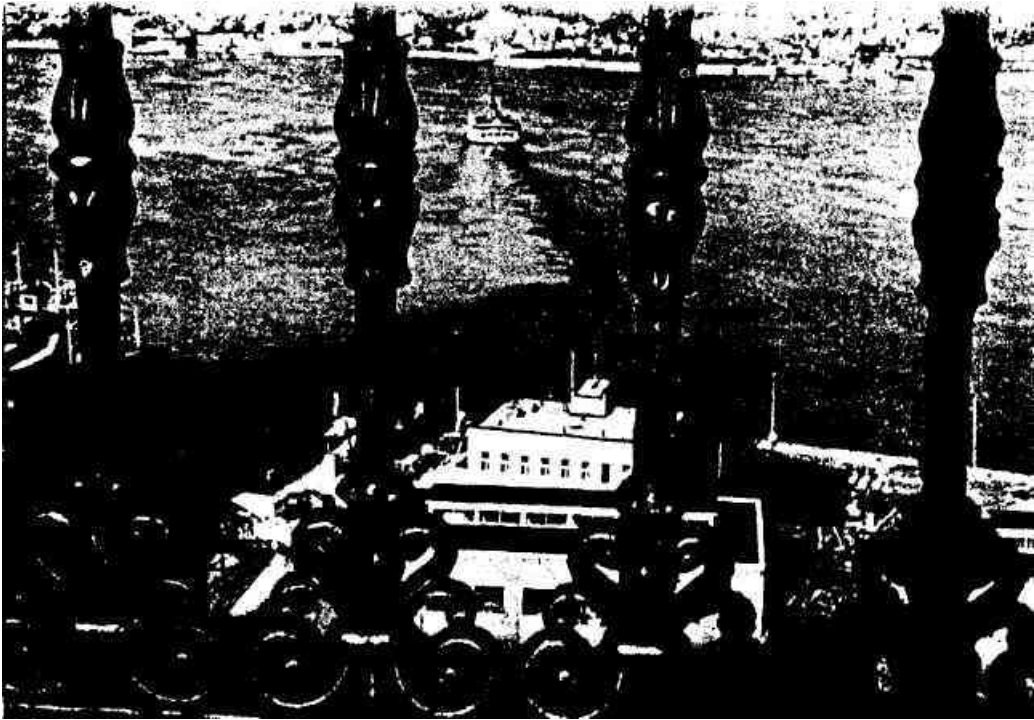
But find Peace they do.

Perhaps, too, it is more difficult for the French-Canadian to find that inner and sober Peace. The love of wine comes naturally and would seem to course along with the lifeblood; and, although the "foreigner" has pushed, is pushing and will continue to push the merits of *eau de vie*, to keep away from that sparkling nectar that comes from the vineyards of the Mother Country of France is anything but *facile*. But keep away they do these lovable and hospitable French-Canadians, these *exivrognes*, these Gallic distillers of *whiskey blanc* and *caribou* — two indigenous hangover specials,

guaranteed to make even the tri-color look like the Star Spangled Banner, stars and all.

Many of us are fortunate enough to know more French than is required to read the usual restaurant menu. To us falls the happy lot to travel about and interpret, rather than translate, the precepts of AA in the Province of Quebec. Like unknowingdrunkseverywhere, this, they say, is what they've been looking for. Soon they are singing *Alouette*, happily, instead of in bibulous dissonance. For the first time, you understand the words. (For the uninitiate, *Alouette* is the French-Canadian equivalent of that other inebriate special *Sweet Adeline*.)

The Story of the formation of the Quebec City group adds another yarn to the extraordinary list piled up by AA. Claude, a new member in Montreal, and a native of the Maritime Provinces of Canada, was transferred to Quebec City. He hated the idea. In his drinking days he took an aversion to this tourist mecca. (He swears there's no connection.) He'd never set foot in the place. He just loathed it alcoholically. He spoke nary a word of French, even his English was a little bit different. As in the case of the honeymooners, here was another instance of *vive le difference*. Claude had the name of one prospect, a French-Canadian. He got in touch with the lad, and sure enough, that old AA co-incidence



which is *a* great deal more than just mere co-incidence, came up again. The two had crossed paths in the Army overseas. In their subsequent and separate drinking careers they had even forgotten each other's names. In the space of about two months the Quebec City group had grown to more than thirty members. Here, truly a major *Victoire!*

In Arvida, the group is only half as large, but just as active. It was formed two years ago and Omer, the founder, was given his two-year token a while back. A middle-aged man, Omer had run the usual drunken gamut from tavern to hos-

pital and from bar to institution and from one bad job to a worse one. Today he holds one of the most responsible positions (in two languages) in one of the world's largest industries.

Will it be Jean or Jacques next? Marie-Ange or Gaby? What matters? If they are as good members as the present roster in the Province of Quebec they'll do all right. Twofisted drinkers in the old pre-AA days, these French-speaking members know that in their drinking, as in their driving, the warning *Arretez* means *Stop*, and that AA provides the twelve-notched brakes.

— C.C., *Montreal, Quebec*