

# Remembering Bill...

November 26, 1895–January 24, 1971



**B**ILL'S old desk is clear today. His voice is as lucid as ever, on tape, in books, in filing cabinets. He still has much to tell us.

Two of Bill's familiar concerns about AA's future bear repetition here. The first concerns the destiny of AA; the second concerns the memory of Bill himself in the unfolding of that destiny.

Of our Fellowship, he said, "Beyond a Higher Power as each of us may vision Him, AA must never, as a society, enter into the field of dogma or theology. We can never become a religion in that sense, lest we kill our usefulness by getting bogged down in theological contention."

And he made the caution still

clearer: "As a society, we must never become so vain as to suppose that we have been the authors and inventors of a new religion. We will humbly reflect that each of AA's principles, *every one of them*, has been borrowed from ancient sources. We shall remember that we are laymen, holding ourselves in readiness to cooperate with all men of goodwill, whatever their creed or nationality. . . .

"There are those who predict that Alcoholics Anonymous may well become a new spearhead for a spiritual awakening throughout the world. When our friends say these things, they are both generous and sincere. But we of AA must reflect that such a tribute and such a prophecy could

well prove to be a heady drink for most of us — that is, if we really came to believe this to be the real purpose of AA, and if we commenced to behave accordingly. Our society, therefore, will prudently cleave to its single purpose: the carrying of the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Let us resist the proud assumption that since God has enabled us to do well in one area, we are destined to be a channel of saving grace for everybody."

In these paragraphs, Bill asks us simply to preserve our humility as a fellowship.

Much the same humility was infused into Bill's confidence that Alcoholics Anonymous would continue into the future — and continue in health — without him.

Once he wrote: "It seems proved that AA can stand on its own feet anywhere and under any conditions. It has outgrown any dependence it might once have had upon the personalities or efforts of the older members like me. New, able, and

vigorous people keep coming to the surface, turning up where they are needed. Besides, AA has reached enough spiritual maturity to know that its final dependence is upon God."

For those of us who might wish to see our Bill regarded by posterity as a saint in the pantheon of modern gods, now is the time to reflect carefully upon his humility and wisdom. For, in truth, Bill was not a saint. He would have recoiled — and did — at the suggestion. He was a plain man.

His words of warning apply as much to sweet memories of him as they do to other beloved ghosts of our own pasts who settle in our recollections today: "Nothing can be more demoralizing than a clinging and abject dependence upon another human being. This often amounts to the demand for a degree of protection and love that no one could possibly satisfy. So our hoped-for protectors finally flee, and once more we are left alone — either to grow up or disintegrate."

So long, Bill.

*Reprinted from the March 1971 Grapevine  
Bill W. memorial issue*