Each year during the season of giving thanks we try to bring you a few new and meaningful words on an old but ever-deepening subject: the Twelve Traditions of AA. We heard none better in the past year than Bill W.'s closing words to the General Service Conference, and we saved them for this, our Traditions Issue.

THIS Conference opened on the keynotes of prudence, trust and faith, and its proceedings have been characterized by these attitudes and practices throughout. Confidence has therefore abounded among us and in this year's session we have gone nearly scot-free of any worry or fear. Indeed we have gone along so quietly that we have rather missed the usual excitements of hot debate and "viewing with alarm for the good of the movement."

But there has been an excitement nevertheless; a healthier excitement of quite another quality and kind. For instance: I found a most satisfying excitement as I watched the real eagerness, discipline and dedication with which this assembly has waded for days through a great pile of humdrum but very necessary routine work. It made me most happy when I heard you delegates pay repeated and grateful tributes to the folks back home—to those hundreds of committeemen and thousands of General Service Representatives whose combined labor had been, and always must be, the final foundation on which our whole world service structure and effort can securely rest.

AA service leadership, you said, was not for delegates and trustees alone; it had to be out there in the grass roots—and it already was there.

Then, too, we have all been gladdened by reports from nearly every quarter of our fellowship to the effect that confidence and real trust in our world services and servants has been much on the increase; that the fears of other days have almost evaporated. These are some of the newer and healthier excitements that we have felt in this notable conference of 1959.

Fresh in memory is that great big laugh we had when one of you delegates, addressing me, rose and said, "Bill, we all heard you give that convincing pitch on trust and faith the night we got here. Now what would you say if I told you that out in our country we have a member who was supposed to be acting as our treasurer for a pretty large and important meeting; that the minute the tickets were sold and the money was banked, he developed a terrific thirst, drew out all that dough, and took off on a traveling wingding that blazed a cross-country trail a thousand miles long?" We all remember how our fellow delegates grinned as he spoke...
and how we roared with mirth as
he finished.

Now there was a time, years
back, when such a thirsty and ab-
sconding treasurer could have shat-
tered our confidence wholesale. How
well I remember the first one! I can
remember, too, my own shock and
chagrin when one of my best friends
attacked me mercilessly because
he didn't like the way I was acting.
I remember those first breaks of
anonymity at the top public level
and all of the fear and violent con-
troversy that followed in their wake.
Such were the alarms of AA's early
time. We feared we couldn't stay
sober, we feared our group couldn't
survive, we really feared that AA
might collapse completely.

But how times have changed!
What was once a big fear is today
a big laugh—take that one about
the erring treasurer. In it I think
we can find some wonderful things.

Let it be recalled that in that laugh
there wasn't a trace of contempt or
anger. There wasn't the slightest
thought of punishment and I'll
wager that not one soul here would
have thought to call him a thief.
Underneath that laugh there was
sympathetic understanding, there
was the realization that any one
of us was still capable of an equal
folly. Because we understood so
well, we could forgive lightly and
easily. Of course, we were laughing
at the startled and penniless con-
vention as it heard the bad news.
But I think our laugh had a far
deepener meaning than this.

In reality I'm sure we were laugh-
ing at ourselves, at our old and
far fetched fears. We were rejoicing
because they had gone. Gone was
the awful fear of what an individ-
ual's failure or behavior might do
to us all, gone was the long time
fear that the pressures and conflicts
of the world around us might one
day infiltrate and crush AA. We
laughed, I think, because we had
no bondage to fear and felt free.
We had ceased to doubt our collec-
tive safety and security.

This brings me to another
thought, another reason for reas-
urance. Of most nations and so-
cieties it seems true that their col-
lective behavior has often been far
worse than the individual behavior
of their memberships. For example,
few individuals in the world of to-
day are hankering for war. Yet
many nations crave conquest and
armed conflict. Nations notable for
the individual honesty of their citi-
zens will keep phony books, inflate
their currencies, load their people
with debts that can't be paid and
engage in all sorts of fraudulent
propaganda and practices. Even the
great religions, as organizations,
have, quite contrary to their own
personal lives. Mobs do all sorts of things
posing them would seldom do sepa-
rately and on their own.

While it's not for us to take a
moral inventory of the world in any
sense of pride or superiority, I do
think it fair and timely to point
out we AAs have thus far demon-
strated a collective behavior prob-
ably much superior to our individ-
ual conduct. The whole, in our
case, seems to be rather better than
the sum of its individual parts. We
are pretty much a bunch of power
drivers. Yet AA, as a whole, has
never quarreled with anybody. We
like money for ourselves but we
keep our fellowship treasuries poor.
We like prestige, yet we somehow
remain anonymous. As individuals
we are apt to be aggressive, yet our
society as a whole is quite non-
aggressive, minding its own business.

In short, we are in a strange con-
trast to the world about us, and we
devoutly hope we shall stay that
way. In these perilous times this
will be the sort of collective pru-
dence that we shall constantly need.
It will guarantee our effectiveness,
safety and survival as nothing else
can.

Our collective prudence respect-
ing money, fame and controversy—
derived of course from our Twelve
Traditions—has continued to make
AA new hosts of friends, and, just
as importantly, no enemies. May
this benign process never stop, with-
in and without our fellowship.

As this wonderful Conference has
so well shown, the absence of fear
has made way for wisdom and
prudence; prudence has led us to
confidence and trust and faith—
faith in our fellow man, faith in our-
selves, and faith in God's love.