



THE BIG BOOK?

- - never read it!

The Chairman

"HOW many in this group have read the Big Book?" asked the Chairman, as he looked around the room where 24 members of the Mid-Week closed meeting were gathered. He counted 16 hands raised in answer to his question.

"Frankly, it is always amazing to me that anyone who professes membership in the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous has neglected to read this text book of the program. Inasmuch as this book is recognized as the sole authority for the most successful approach — to date - to the disease known as alcoholism, it has always seemed to me that the reading of this extraordinary book is the one 'must' in AA. In fact, in my humble opinion it should be read, not only by the sick person coming into AA, but by

the family and friends of the alcoholic, physicians, clergymen, psychiatrists and welfare workers. No other book presents such an intimate view of the problem which the alcoholic faces. And certainly there is no other source from which the man or woman honestly seeking help in arresting his drinking problem can find steps for recovery so simply or completely presented.

"For instance, how far do we imagine the movement of Alcoholics Anonymous would have progressed had the Big Book not been printed in April 1939? And without this treatise to guide the uncertain footsteps of the early members, can't you see what a chaotic situation might have arisen with groups in the wide spread localities each attesting that their interpretation of

the 12 Steps was the official pitch. Acceptance of our AA book actually solidified our movement. It became *the* authority of the program." The Chairman paused to light a cigarette.

"When I make the statement that 'the opinions expressed are my own and do not reflect those of AA, etc.,' I am granted for a brief period the privilege of free speech regarding my interpretations of the 12 Steps, how I use them and what they've done for me. I am an authority — but, *only on myself*. I am an example — good or bad — of the fundamental explanation of the 12 Steps of Recovery from alcoholism as presented in the Big Book.

"I could listen to a hundred speakers and possibly get as many views on the mysteries of the AA program. However, my confusion would disappear as soon as I could get hold of my Big Book and re-read the original principles set down on its pages as guides to progress through following the program of recovery.

"I heard a speaker say that the shortest road to humility is humiliation, of which AA has an abundance . . . The thousands of miracles which can be attributed to the movement of Alcoholics Anonymous grew out of the Big Book. Perhaps sufficient emphasis is not placed on the AA book at meetings. Most secretaries in making announcements casually remark that 'literature is available at a table in the

back of the room, and the book' - pointing to the copy of the Big Book standing on the speaker's table - 'can be had for \$3.50. If you don't have the three-and-a-half, we'll try to arrange for you to get a copy on easy terms' . . .

The Chairman laughed: "What do you suppose the guy shaking apart in the last row thinks? The guy who hasn't even got four-bits in his pocket, but is on a still-hunt for help with his drinking problem? Has the secretary's statement about The Book made the shivering alcoholic conscious of the fact that within the red and yellow cover of this book are words of encouragement and hope, illustrated by stories of other men who suffered even as he is doing right now? . . . I may be wrong, but it seems to me that a bit of the medicine-man technique might be introduced in pointing up the importance of not only reading — but of owning the Big Book.

"Now that I've set the stage, as it were, I'd like to hear some pros and cons regarding this book." The Chairman held up a copy and thumb-ed through the pages. "Before we begin this discussion," he said, "I'd like to read a quotation which appears on page 380 . . . 'There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which can not fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance - that principle is contempt *prior to investigation*.' "...

He lighted another cigarette, settled back in his chair and asked: "Who wants to carry on from here?"

"It's quite a coincidence, you're picking on this subject tonight," said Roger. "As you know, I'm a salesman and I get over a good part of the country. I've attended meetings in Denver, Des Moines, Chicago, Memphis, West Palm Beach, New York, Boston and many points in between. But I never leave on a trip without packing my copy of the Big Book in my grip. I regard it as my insurance toward a sober trip. Yet last night I heard a chap speaking at a meeting make the statement that he'd *never* read the book. Didn't think it was necessary. That he'd stayed dry for 19 months and didn't think he'd even bother to read it now ... I know he's entitled to his opinion and so long as he's dry — his way — I have no right to dispute him. But brother, that made me boil. Just for the sake of common courtesy and thankfulness to the founders of AA for giving us this recovery program, it should be required reading, at least a quick-through-once."

The Chairman grinned at Roger: "I know how you felt, because I remember how you bought your first copy on two-bit installments. And I also recall that your interpretations of the 12 Steps to new-comers were strictly according to AA-Hoyle.

Margie, what's been your experience with the Big Book?"

"If it hadn't been for that book,

I might not be here tonight. You see, my brother was the one the family was worried about, so AA was contacted for him. My drinking was confined to my bedroom, and one night I picked up my brother's AA book, took it to my room and within a couple days found myself at an AA meeting. It was the chapter entitled 'There Is a Solution' that made a deep impression on me. Here I learned that I had lost the power of choice in drink. That my so-called will power had become non-existent."

"That's quite convincing evidence in favor of the book" said the Chairman. "Tom, you've been around a long time. Tell us about your experience with the Book."

"As some of you know, three of us started this group. We had bought one book between us, and our first meetings consisted in reading and discussing the chapters 'How It Works,' 'Into Action' and 'Working with Others.' Before long we had placed our initial order for four copies. Boy, were we proud! Two of those were loaned to a couple of luses we had hopes of recruiting, and that introduced us to a situation that occasionally caused us financial embarrassment . . . our books and luses more than once disappeared, and seldom returned. But we felt that the seed had been planted and some day, somewhere, it would take root. Once to our astonishment we had a book returned anonymously. Obviously, we would

really have been handicapped in making progress without our Big Book. And those of you who were around in our early days remember how we lived by the principles and philosophy we learned from reading the Book."

"Tom's group beginning with the help of the Big Book reminds me of the AA member who lives in the Marshall Islands and talks about his three-man group — 'God, the Big Book and me.' . . . But how about some opinions from the eight members who admitted never having read the Book?" inquired the Chairman. "I'll exclude the three newcomers as they probably haven't had time, nor the inclination to do much reading in the 24 hours they have been dry. . . . But Duke, you've been around AA for over two years and yet you admit that you've never read the Big Book? How come?"

"In the first place I wouldn't keep a copy of the Book in my house. And secondly, I'm not interested in reading a series of stories of drunken careers. I never hit a bottom that caused me to lose everything. However, I can go along with parts of the AA philosophy, such as staying sober for 24 hours and not taking the first drink. Also, if I have to, I can help an alcoholic. I came into Alcoholics Anonymous because I saw that my drinking was assuming proportions beyond my control. I still had my health, my thinking had not been impaired, but my moral values,

such as differentiating between right and wrong were becoming distorted. I attributed this to my excess drinking. I knew about AA, had heard it worked, but frankly was surprised when I attended my first meeting. I expected to meet a bunch of worn out, down-at-the-heel individuals. I like what I found. I use what I need. But I can't see what it's going to profit me to read — and reread as some of you do—depressing stories of failures ..."

"Remember, Duke, about criticism before investigation!" chided the Chairman. Duke frowned and continued: "The 12 Step program I can learn about through attendance at my regular weekly meeting, and in discussion." He smiled wryly, "And, after all, I am sober today."

"I admire your frank honesty, Duke. But even a man materially intact, with aggressive pride and will power that operates in so-called normal conditions, can become an alcoholic just as helpless and hopeless as the case histories in the Big Book. And occasionally a look in our rear view mirror is essential in guiding our forward progress . . . Anyway, remember there is help and comfort in these pages — if you ever feel the need.

"Now, Elsie, what's your excuse for not reading the Book? Haven't you even got the native curiosity of a woman to see what gives under such an intriguing title?"

"My husband won't let me buy an AA book nor have a copy around

the house. He's ashamed that I had to come to AA for help."

"I've got news for you, Elsie. There's a chapter in the Big Book entitled 'The Family Afterward' which if handled diplomatically is intended to help correct such attitudes. You see, sudden sobriety poses adjustments on both sides of the family. So your cue is to practice 'First Things First,' 'Live and Let Live,' and 'Easy Does It,' ... In the meantime come over to our house and read my Big Book.

"Now Charlie, as our champion 12-Stepper, before we close perhaps you can tell us just what the Big Book has meant to you during your several years of trying to dry up the community!"

"I'm not bragging but I've re-read the Big Book completely once a year for the seven years I've been in AA. And many times in-between I've picked it up and read a chapter just to give myself a lift. But in my work with prospects I never make a call without a copy under my arm. I remember one Sunday afternoon I got a call and could not lay my hands on a Big Book. But I recalled leaving one with a guy and his wife a week before. I drove by their house. They weren't home and through the windows I could see the joint was a shambles. I pried open the kitchen window and made my way through a wilderness of bottles to the living room where I found my copy of the Big Book, right where I'd left it. I

wrote a note and told them I'd taken it, and made my call across town. Told this guy, who really seemed interested, to start reading the Book and I'd be back tomorrow ... But 'tomorrow' I was served with a summons to appear in court for house-breaking! . . . Yeah, the drunken couple resented my forcing my way into their house ... But being a newspaper guy and standing well with the police judge, I got a suspended sentence. And the couple who appeared against me, still half-tanked, got a strong suggestion from the judge that they get hold of a copy of the AA book and learn what their trouble was ... A year later the woman was committed to an asylum and the guy called me for help . . . Sure I went, and he's doing okay down-state right now. For my dough I wouldn't be happy without a copy of the Big Book within reach at all times."

"Nice going, Charlie. And now if you three new members have developed sufficient curiosity to crack the covers of this book, meet me after the meeting closes and I'll see that you get your textbook for your course in Recovery from Alcoholism. And *this* opinion has been expressed by thousands through the 17 years of Alcoholics Anonymous existence. . . Reading the Big Book is the soundest method of becoming acquainted with and learning about the AA program. Then there's something about the pride of ownership!"