

August 1955



A fragment of a scene-behind-the-scenes at St. Louis, by an accidental, anonymous witness

**T**HIS is a story told out of turn, of a meeting that was never considered for the agenda of the Fifth General Service Conference. If it deserves a place in the record, that is because it suggests, more eloquently than any formal vote or advisor action, the responsibilities inherent in the third legacy of service which now is passed into the hands of the Conference and,

through it, into the hands of all who comprise our fellowship.

The time was the evening of the first day of the Conference, that period when the agenda was reserved to area Delegates exclusively. It was an evening of open time for Bill, for members of the Headquarters staff, for those Trustees who had already joined the burgeoning throng in St. Louis. It

was an evening when Bill, facing a week that was sure to drain emotional and physical resources, might have been forgiven for seeking the companionship of a small gathering, or the deeper comfort of solitude itself.

Those intimate privileges were not to be his that evening. Instead, unknown to most, Bill was a participant in a meeting at which no notes were taken, no rules of order invoked, no decisions solemnly recorded.

In a little-used room off the beaten path of the Jefferson Hotel's main traffic, Bill sat on one side of a long, green-covered table. Encircling him were perhaps ten or a dozen men who cannot be identified except to indicate that they were men of disciplined minds, questing and compassionate hearts and high status in their community.

Through one of their number who knew and applauded AA, they had sought the privilege of meeting Bill, of talking with him of this recovery program whose earliest courier he had been. They sought, also (it may be assumed), the right to ask all manner of questions.

They did not all arrive in one group—but singly and by twos and threes. They approached quietly by way of an outer room, quickly concluded the amenities of recognition or introduction and joined those who had preceded them at the green table.

The first night visitors arrived at nine o'clock. Occasionally a visitor would leave, only to be succeeded minutes later by another arrival. Ten

o'clock passed. There was a brief break in the meeting and then, through the closed door, once more was heard the faint rhythm of questions asked and answered, the blurred roar of hearty laughter and the occasional clinking of an ash tray.

Eleven o'clock passed. The indistinct hum of voices continued. By now the one scheduled meeting of the Conference had dissolved. By now most of the Headquarters people had put down their last coffee cups of the day and were groping for the awkward bulk of their room keys. By now, more sophisticated members might have reasoned, Bill had given amply of his time and had earned the right to escape to personal privacy. But . . .

Midnight came and passed. Moving down the deserted corridor, a watchman tested the door gently and then withdrew, perhaps perplexed by the strange scene. For this must have seemed an odd meeting. The trappings of men seeking simple answers from one of their number are simple indeed and almost forgotten these days.

For these are times when the overstuffed briefcase, the sharpened pencils and pristine pads, are too often the conventional symbols of meetings.

There were none of these in the room with the green table. This was a meeting of minds and hearts, a giving and taking of experience, a tentative search for deep truths that may one day be shared without reserve by all who would heal themselves and others, so that the greatest purposes of life may be realized.