

January 1950

The Serenity Prayer

...it's origin is traced...

AT long last the mystery of the Serenity Prayer has been solved!

We have learned who wrote it, when it was written and how it came to the attention of the early members of AA. We have learned, too, how it was originally written, a bit of information which should lay to rest all arguments as to which is the correct quotation.

The timeless little prayer has been credited to almost every theologian, philosopher and saint known to man. The most popular opinion on its authorship favors St. Francis of Assisi.

It was actually written by Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, of the Union Theological Seminary, New York City, in about 1932 as the ending to a longer prayer. In 1934 the doctor's friend and neighbor, Dr. Howard Robbins asked permission to use that part of the longer prayer in a compilation he was making at

the time. It was published in that year in Dr. Robbins' book of prayers.

Dr. Niebuhr says, "Of course, it may have been spooking around for years, even centuries, but I don't think so. I honestly do believe that I wrote it myself."

It came to the attention of an early member of AA in 1939. He read it in an obituary appearing in the *New York Times*. He liked it so much he brought it in to the little office on Vesey St. for Bill W. to read. When Bill and the staff read the little prayer, they felt that it particularly suited the needs of AA. Cards were printed and passed around. Thus the simple little prayer became an integral part of the AA movement.

Today it is in the pockets of thousands of AAs; it is framed and placed on the wall of AA meeting rooms throughout the world; it appears monthly on the back cover of your magazine and every now

and then someone tells us that we have quoted it incorrectly. We have.

As it appears in *The A. A. Grapevine*, it reads:

*God grant me the serenity
To accept things I cannot change,
Courage to change things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.*

Many tell us that it should read:

*God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
The courage to change the things I can;
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

The way it was originally written by Dr. Niebuhr is as follows:

*God give me the serenity to accept things which cannot be changed;
Give me courage to change things which must be changed;
And the wisdom to distinguish one from the other.*

Dr. Niebuhr doesn't seem to mind that his prayer is incorrectly quoted. . . a comma. . . a preposition . . . even several verbs. . . the meaning and the message remain intact.

"In fact," says the good doctor, "in some respects, I believe your way is better."

