In September 1939, the first national article about Alcoholics Anonymous appeared, published in Liberty Magazine and written by a freelance journalist named Morris Markey. You will see that this article differs, in some significant ways, from AA history as we know it. But it’s a sympathetic account of AA and its publication was a real break for the fledgling society, which had just published the Big Book and was struggling to make ends meet. About 800 letters came into AA “headquarters” in response to the article. Bill W. later wrote: “We carefully answered each one, not forgetting to enclose a book order blank. Orders soon began to come in and, helped by still more letters from our little office on Vesey Street, and by traveling AA members, new groups started up.”

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wait. How permanent is his recovery?

Our doctor says this: "Though the aggregate of full recoveries through physical and psychiatric effort is considerable, we doctors must admit that we have made little impression upon the problem as a whole. For there are many types which do not respond to the psychological approach.

"I do not believe that true alcoholism is entirely a matter of individual mental control. I have had many men who had, for example, worked for a period of months on some business deal which was to be settled on a certain date ... For reasons they could not afterward explain, they took a drink a day or two prior to the date ... and the important engagement was not even kept. These men were not drinking to escape. They were drinking to overcome a craving beyond their mental control.

"The classification of alcoholics is most difficult. There are, of course, the psychopaths who are emotionally unstable ... They are over-remorseful and make many resolutions — but never a decision.

"There is the type who is unwilling to admit that he cannot take a drink just like the rest of the boys. He does tricks with his drinking — changing his Brand, or drinking only after meals, or changing his companions. None of this helps him strengthen his control and be like other people. Then there are types entirely normal in every respect except in the effect which alcohol had upon them ...

"All these, and many others, have one symptom in common: They cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving ... The only relief we have to suggest is complete abstinence from alcohol."

But are these unfortunate people really capable, mentally, of abstaining completely? Their bodies may be cured of craving. Can their minds be cured? Can they be rid of the deadly "compulsion neurosis"?

Among physicians the general opinion seems to be that chronic alcoholics are doomed.

But wait!

Within the last four years, evidence has appeared which has startled hardened medical men by proving that the compulsion neurosis can be entirely eliminated. Perhaps you are one of those cynical people who will turn away when I say that the root of this new discovery is religion. But be patient for a moment.

About three years ago [editor's note: it was closer to five] a man appeared at the hospital in New York of which our doctor is head physician. It was his third "cure." Since his first visit he had lost his job, his friends, his health, and his self-respect. He was now living on the earnings of his wife.

He had tried every method he could find to cure his disease: had read all the great philosophers and psychologists. He had tried religion but he simply could not accept it. It would not seem real and personal to him.

He went through the cure as usual, and came out of it in very low spirits. He was lying in bed, emptied of vitality and thought, when suddenly, a strange and totally unexpected thrill went through his body and mind. He called out for the doctor. When the doctor came in, the man looked up at him and grinned.

"Well, doc," he said, "my troubles are all over. I've got religion."

"Why, you're the last man ..."

"Sure. I know all that. But I've got it. And I know I'm cured of this drinking business for good."

He talked with great intensity for a while and then said, "Listen, doc. I've got to see some other patient — one that is about to be dismissed."

The doctor demurred. It all sounded a trifle fanatical. But finally he consented. And thus was born the movement which is now flourishing with almost sensational success as "Alcoholics Anonymous."

Here is how it works:

Every member of the group — which is to say every person who has been saved — is under obligation to carry on the work, to save other men. That, indeed, is a fundamental part of his own mental cure. He gains strength and confidence by active work with other victims.

He finds his subject among acquaintances, at a "cure" institution, or perhaps by making inquiry of a preacher, a priest, or a doctor. He begins his talk with his new acquaintance by telling him the true nature of his disease and how remote are his chances for permanent cure.

When he has convinced the man that he is a true alcoholic and must never drink again, he continues:

"You had better admit that this thing is beyond your own control. You've tried to solve it by yourself, and you have failed. All right. Why not put the whole thing into the hands of Somebody Else?"

Even though the man might be an atheist or agnostic, he will almost always admit that there is some sort of force operating in the world — some cosmic power weaving a design. And his new friend will say:

"I don't care what you call this Somebody Else. We call it God. But whatever you want to call it, you had better put yourself into its hands. Just admit you're licked, and say, 'Here I am, Somebody Else. Take care of this thing for me.'"

The new subject will generally con-
sent to attend one of the weekly meetings of the movement.

He will find twenty-five or thirty ex-drunks gathered in somebody's home for a pleasant evening. There are no sermons. The talk is gay or serious as the mood strikes.

The new candidate cannot avoid saying to himself, "These birds are ex-drunks. And look at them! They must have something. It sounds kind of screwy, but whatever it is I wish to heaven I could get it too."

One or another of the members keeps working on him from day to day. And presently the miracle — But let me give you an example:

I sat down in a quiet room with Mr. B., a stockily built man of fifty with a rather stern, intelligent face.

"I'll tell you what happened a year ago," he said. "I was completely washed up. Financially I was all right, because my money is in a trust fund. But I was a drunken bum of the worst sort. My family was almost crazy with my incessant sprees.

"I took the cure in New York." (At the hospital we have mentioned.) "When I came out of it, the doctor suggested I go to one of these meetings the boys were holding. I just laughed. My father was an atheist and had taught me to be one. But the doctor kept saying it wouldn't do me any harm, and I went.

"I sat around listening to the jabber. It didn't register with me at all. I went home. But the next week I found myself drawn to the meeting. And again they worked on me while I shook my head. I said, 'It seems O.K. with you, boys, but I don't even know your language. Count me out.'

"Somebody said the Lord's Prayer, and the meeting broke up. I walked three blocks to the subway station. Just as I was about to go down the stairs — bang!" He snapped his fingers hard. "It happened! I don't like that word miracle, but that's all I can call it. The lights in the street seemed to flare up. My feet seemed to leave the pavement. A kind of shiver went over me, and I burst out crying.

"I went back to the house where we had met, and rang the bell, and Bill let me in. We talked until two o'clock in the morning. I haven't touched a drop since, and I've set four other fellows on the same road."

The medical profession, in general, accepts the principle as sound.

The Foundation has lately published a book, called Alcoholics Anonymous. And if alcoholism is a problem in your family or among your friends, I heartily recommend that you get hold of a copy. It may very well help you to guide a sick man — an allergic alcoholic — on the way to health and contentment.