

October 1946

"DOWN UNDER" A.A.S REPORT STEADY GROWTH**AUSTRALIAN BRANCH NOTES No.1
(By One of the Original Members)**

The Australian branch of Alcoholics Anonymous came into being in October, 1944. Its founders (all non-alcoholics) were the Reverend Father T.V. Dunlea (parish priest of Sutherland, N.S.W.), Dr. S.J. Minogue (superintendent of the Rydalmere Mental Hospital, Sydney, N.S.W.), and Mr. A.V. McKinnon (a mental nurse in a Sydney mental hospital).

Father Dunlea is a born benevolent in his early fifties, his hand forever dipping into his pocket to help those in distress. Dr. Minogue belongs to the same generation as the priest, is kindly and tolerant of disposition and has made alcoholism a life-long study. Mr. McKinnon is just on the right side of forty, and although officially a layman, his knowledge of alcoholics and of alcoholism is advanced.

Our first meeting was held in a ramshackle humpy in the depths of typical Australian bushland - dull green and with that solemn melancholy of which our poets so often write. Now, in June, 1946, we have a convalescent home at Sutherland, capable of housing 20 or 30 patients, who are in need of mental and physical rehabilitation, and have taken over a residential in Sydney where members live, pay rent and go to

work; this place can accommodate 20 or so people and in it we have our meeting room, where we congregate twice weekly.

An Australian A.A. census has never been taken, but we estimate our membership at 150. It is too early to state how many have completely recovered, but probably no more than 12. Fifty-odd have shown very marked improvement, their relapses occurring less frequently as time goes on. The rest are just floundering around.

Our greatest difficulty has been to persuade many new members to carry out 12th Step work. No matter how much we talk, plead or point out the dreadful consequences of failure to help their fellow drunk, these lads and lasses just listen and continue to follow their policy of selfish and masterly inactivity. Then they crash. And we tell 'em why they crashed - failure to implement the 12, and particularly the 12th, Step. We help them to their feet again, get them jobs and away they go, keeping sober, buying themselves new suits and frocks, but utterly and completely ignoring the 12th and most of the other Steps, till they crash again and have to pawn their new suits and frocks to keep up their supplies of liquor. We don't know what you Americans do with these lads and lassies, but we would like to, for they give us dreadful headaches.

Our greatest asset (apart from our founders) is one Frank Sturge Harty. He is a veteran of World War I, and now runs a radio session of the personal problems type. Frank is an untiring worker for A.A., both on the air and off it. Tall, dark and soldierly-looking, he is to be seen at almost every meeting and frequently visits our home at Sutherland. Although not himself an alcoholic, his life has been as varied and has had as many ups and downs as that of the average inebriate, which naturally helps him to understand us the better. - Rex A.

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A letter from Dr. Minogue, who is identified in the above correspondence, brings more heartening news:

"Since my last letter things have taken a decided turn for the better. The picture, 'Lost Weekend,' did us a power of good. R. wrote an article on A.A. and inebriates and this was published in our leading newspaper. I also gave an interview to another daily and the article treated the whole subject, for a daily newspaper, most sympathetically. Both these articles were sought on account of the interest created by 'Lost Weekend.' The picture has had a very mixed reception. While few have liked it, it has

had a very good run and still continues to draw big crowds.

"However, as a result of this publicity, we have had numerous inquiries, many contacts and new members. The members we are now getting are the type we have sought since the beginning, professional men and business executives. Also, many who came are not the true inebriates, but men who realize that they are drinking too heavily and must give it up. Returned soldiers predominate, especially those with anticky shakes. The lot of these men is particularly hard. They are ignored by the repatriation and no one wants them. Last night, for example, I admitted here an officer who had been a P.O.W. in Japan for three and a half years. He has been drinking since his return nine months ago and now has lost his job and is threatened with divorce.

New Interest Created

"We have split up our meetings, one on Tuesday night, a social evening, one on Friday night for inebriates only. As the attendance on Fridays has grown to over 30, we are on verge of splitting up into a number of sub-groups. A chemist, Fred E., is to form one at Manly (a seaside suburb about 10 miles from the city), and R. is to form one at Millers Point, the docking suburb of Sydney Harbor. It seems like a dream - R. and B. meeting in my house for months, then at R.'s place; this in turn became too small. Then the rooms in North Sydney, then to Vianny House. Now Vianny House has

become too small! We did find that, as our numbers increased, the personal touch was lost. We now intend to revert back to the original idea of Bill and to meet more frequently in each others' homes. In this way we hope to prevent many relapses.

"A very good piece of news is that a church organization in Melbourne (capital of Victoria, the second biggest city in the Commonwealth with a population of over a million) sent over a representative to investigate A.A. He was so pleased that he is to select two alcoholics and will send them to Sydney, 600 miles from Melbourne. We will board them at Christmas House and teach them A.A. methods.

"A pleasing feature is that we feel that we have broken down some of the prejudices against us and that we are getting more cooperation, however slight it may be. Doctors ring me up about patients and inquiries continue to come from all parts. On the 27th I am to address a meeting of the B.M.A. (corresponding to your American Medical Association) on alcoholism. This should further increase interest in A.A. amongst doctors in Australia."