

December 1952



For Christmas...

BETWEEN noon of Wednesday, December 24th, 1952 and midnight of Thursday, January 1st, 1953, some 120,000 members of AA will have seen their dreams of a dry Christmas and their hopes of a sane New Year's come safely true.

It will be the 17th holiday season that AA has weathered in the mutual help of fellowship. And, based on past experiences, it will be a time of many new hands knocking on AA's door ... of persons whose holidays and lives have at long last proved unmanageable. Intergroups and central offices have come to know that the first week of January means the year's peak of phone calls and visits of inquiry.

The first Christmas for AA was the depression year of 1935. There were three old timers to mark it ... hardly a dozen newcomers to share it with them. In Akron, Dr. Bob and Bill D. were going on their second six months. Four recruits had from four months to two months. In New York, Bill W. had thirteen months since his last drink, seven months since his historic trip to Akron and the start of AA.

In Akron, the six gathered with their families at Dr. Bob's. There was no ceremony ... no exchange of presents. The Twelve Steps had not yet been formulated. The Big Book was only a vague stirring that would not even be in manuscript until three more Christmases had been achieved. But there was joy that this most dangerous of times for the alcoholic had arrived ... and twenty-four hours by twenty-four hours was being mastered.

"There were thanks," remembers one of the two who survives that first Akron Christmas, "that we had come this far. However, I am certain that there was still considerable fear and trembling ... not fear that this new way would not work, but doubt and uncertainty that we would be able to hold on to it. We remembered our many failures and thanked God for what He had already granted us and prayed sincerely for continued strength.

"The second Christmas was, of course, a lot more joyful and was celebrated

some AA history...

with a lot more confidence. In those first few years we stuck close together ... we were helped by each other's presence, and we knew how much we needed one another."

Bill W. recalls only a quiet day in New York that Yule of 1935. There were a very few ... and who could know that in a mere 17 years perhaps 120,000 ex-drunks could want to know what happened the first AA Christmas?

Five years later, there was a place in New York for an AA Christmas party ... the first AA clubhouse. And about the 24th Street Club there hangs a real Santa Claus story!

Or rather, it is a Saint Nicholas story. Just one hundred years before, in 1840, the building was erected at Number 334½ West 24th Street... the property of a family named Moore who were large landowners in Manhattan Island's Chelsea section. And driving across the snow-covered lawn, Dr. Clement Clarke Moore began to compose (some say just as his sled runners touched what is now the meeting room of AA's first clubhouse!) his immortal gift to children of all ages. ... "Twas the night before Christmas."

At first, the 24th Street property was occupied by a carpenter shop, with a stable built in the west end ... and then a tinsmithy ... and then a speakeasy ... and then a birthplace for many of those first AA groups that fanned out from New York while others fanned out from Akron.

Again, this Christmas of 1952, AAs will gather in the clubhouse, and there will be, some souls say, a tinkle just at midnight. No, not of ice cubes, they gravely assure you. No, not of glasses clinking together in a Yuletide toast. But listen carefully, they solemnly warn you ... listen, for at just the hour of twelve there are sleigh bells that tinkle especially over this old house where eight tiny reindeer took off from the gentle mind of a good doctor who loved Christmas and all people who can be, for even a moment, Christmas children. . . .