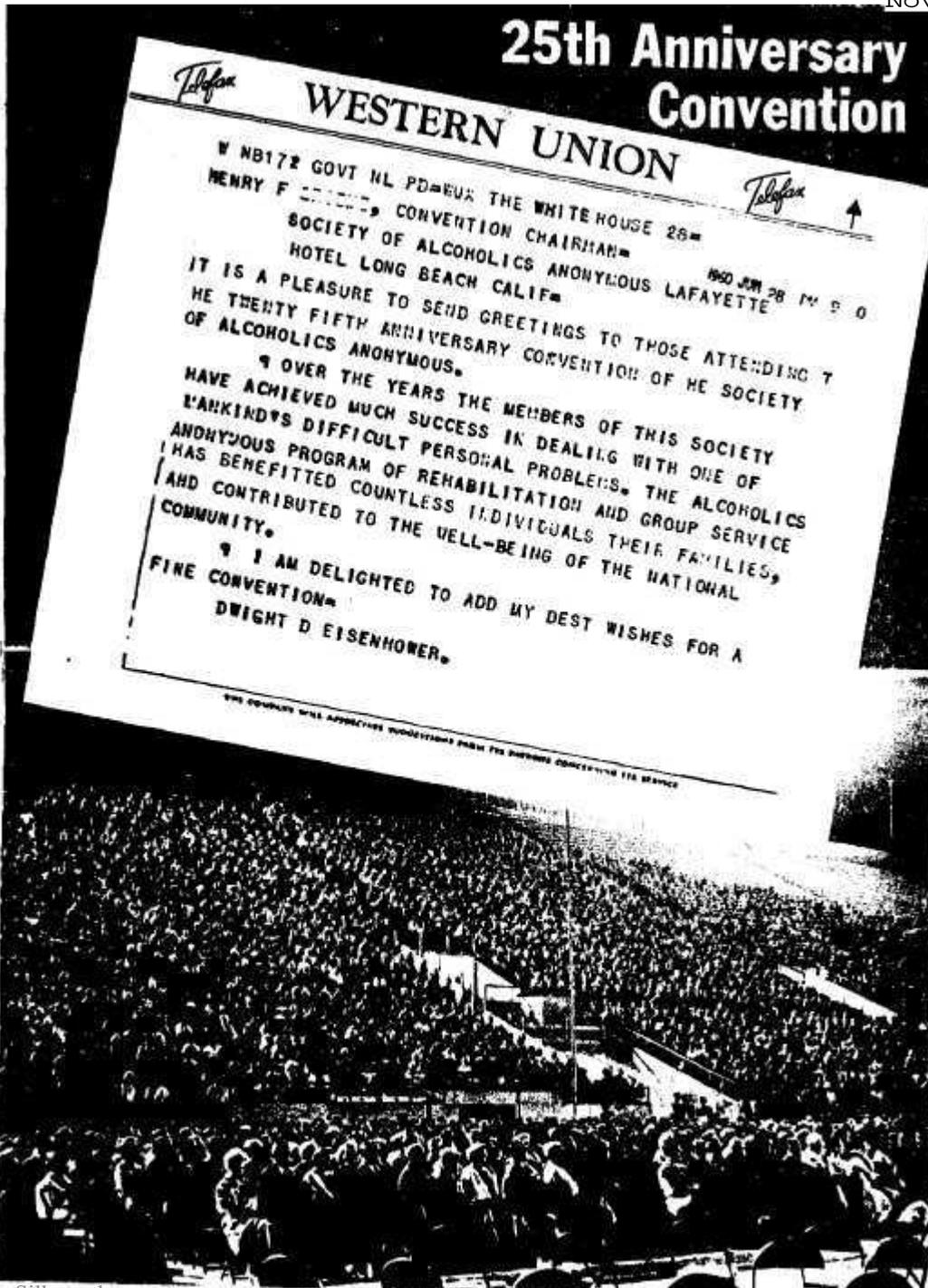


November 1960



IN its deeper sense AA is a quest for freedom—freedom under God. Of course the immediate object of our quest is sobriety—freedom from alcohol and from all its baleful consequences. Without this freedom, we have nothing at all.

Paradoxically, though, we can achieve no liberation from the alcohol obsession until we become willing to deal with those character defects which have landed us in that helpless condition. Even to gain sobriety only, we must attain some freedom from fear, anger and pride; from rebellion and self-righteousness; from laziness and irresponsibility; from foolish rationalization and outright dishonesty; from wrong dependencies and destructive power-driving.

In this freedom quest, we are always given three choices. A rebel-

lious refusal to work upon our glaring defects can be a ticket to destruction. Or, for a time, we can stay sober with a minimum of self-improvement and settle ourselves into a comfortable but often dangerous mediocrity. Or we can continuously try hard for those sterling qualities which can add up to greatness of spirit and action—true and lasting freedom under God, the freedom to find and do *His* will. For most of us this last choice is really ours; we must never be blinded by the futile philosophy that we are just the hapless victims of our inheritance, of our life experience, and our surroundings—that these are the sole forces that make our decisions for us. This is not the road to freedom. We have to believe that we can really choose.

Similarly, our whole society, and every group in it, will constantly face these identical decisions. Shall we

settle for destruction? Shall we try only for the temporary comforts of a complacent mediocrity? Or shall we consistently face the disciplines, make the sacrifices and endure the discomforts that will qualify us to walk the path that invariably leads toward true greatness of spirit and action?

These reflections are meant to be background for the theme of this article—the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

AA's Traditions are the yardsticks by which our fellowship can accurately measure its progress—or the lack of it. In our Traditions we see such wisdom as we have been able to muster in a quarter of a century of living and working together. That these principles stake out the path we ought to follow, there can be little doubt.

As we contemplate the Traditions we see that they have two main characteristics, and that each of these aspects reinforces the other.

The first aspect of the Twelve Traditions is *protection*; the second aspect is *progress*. We are first reminded what our fellowship's temptations really are and by what means we may best deal with them. This is our basis for a continuous moral inventory of our collective behavior—the first step to actively casting aside our road blocks. In the affirmative or positive aspect of the Traditions we learn, both directly and impliedly, how we may best apply the high ideals of sacrifice and willing respon-

sibility, trust and love, in our relations with each other and with the world around us. Out of these practices flows the spiritual energy that moves us along the road to full liberation.

As we ponder *protection*, we see that our Traditions warn against the perils of public fame and power, against the perils of great wealth, against the making of compromising alliances, against professionalism. We are reminded that we may deny no alcoholic member his membership, that we must never create an authoritative government of men. We are cautioned that we should never force AA's message upon the world by aggressive promotional schemes, and that we should shun public controversy as the devil himself.

Such are typical examples of the protective prudence which our Twelve Traditions directly express, or clearly imply. Some claim that these warnings are nothing but the sum of our collective fears. Once upon a time this was very true. In our first years, every violation of these precepts seemed to threaten our actual existence. We then doubted if our rebellious membership could ever resist its great temptations. But we *have* resisted, and so we have survived. Therefore the stark fears of yesterday have since given way to a vigilant prudence—something quite different from unreasoning panic.

Of course, we know that we shall

always have to deal with the fearful forces which are released when the human ego runs amuck—the same forces that are shattering the world of our time. *Deliver us from temptation* must therefore continue to be a prime ingredient of our every attitude, practice and prayer. When things go well, we must never fall into the error of believing that no great ill can possibly befall us. Nor should we accuse ourselves of "negative thinking" when we insist on facing the destructive forces in and around us, both realistically and effectively. Vigilance will always be the price of survival.

This is the protective aspect of our Traditions. But AA's Twelve Traditions should provide us with far more than protection against mediocrity and dissolution—and they do.

Let's now think about the positive, the progressive side of AA's Traditions; the disciplined sacrifices and responsibilities that we shall need to undertake; the degree of mutual trust and love that we shall need to achieve if we are to find the greater freedom we seek. The length of this article will not admit a full examination of all Twelve Traditions in this respect, but a few examples can serve to illustrate just what we mean.

Take Tradition One. It says that AA's common welfare comes first. This really means that our personal ambitions will have to be set aside every time they conflict with the safety or the effectiveness of our fellowship. It means that we must some-

times love our society more than ourselves.

Tradition Two — "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority . . . a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants . . . they do not govern." This is a study in mutual trust in God, in ourselves, and in our service leadership. This has been one of our finest experiments and it has succeeded far beyond our expectations.

Tradition Three defines the personal liberty of the AA member. It says, in effect, that any alcoholic can be an AA member the moment he says so. Neither can any of us deprive him of that membership, no matter what his behavior. Perhaps no other society has ever staked out such a broad expanse of liberty for the individual as this. Every AA newcomer feels at once that he is wanted and trusted and loved. How well we understand his needs; certainly we have had them ourselves. Seldom has any alcoholic taken unfair advantage of that unlimited charter for freedom. We took this decision for individual freedom years ago. We are glad that we did; there has never been any cause for regret.

Tradition Four is yet another confident declaration of mutual trust and love as it flows from each AA group to the other. We give each group full autonomy, the undisturbed right to manage its own affairs. To make this condition doubly permanent and secure, we have guaranteed to all

AA groups that they will never be subjected to any centralized government or authority. In turn each group agrees that it will never take any action that could injure us all. Rarely indeed has any AA group ever forgotten that precious trust.

Tradition Seven proclaims AA's principle of self-support. In it, we undertake to pay every cent of our own service expenses, meanwhile declining outside contributions.

The fact that we don't take money from the outside world builds confidence in every alcoholic who thinks of approaching us. This we know. Public good will has also been increased because people like the idea that the once irresponsible alcoholics have now become responsible. There is no doubt, either, that this salutary practice takes us in the direction of increased freedom for ourselves. By resolutely declining outside funds, whether offered by individual donors or by governments, we are making dead sure that we shall always preserve our own liberty of action. Hence the old adage, "Who pays the piper calls the tune" will never be descriptive of us.

There is little question that large sums could be raised today for AA—that is, if we ever gave the word. Perhaps no greater calamity could befall our fellowship than such a development. We would be at once absolved from the beneficial responsibility of raising our own funds. With lots of *other people's money* available, our *idea-a-minute* mem-

bers would doubtless conceive countless schemes for *doing good*. In those few past instances where we have taken outside money, distraction and contention within has been the almost uniform result. Therefore we are well aware that the responsibility for full self-support brings us great spiritual and practical blessings. This is sacrificial prudence at its best—a chief bulwark to our cherished freedoms.

Another example: Tradition Ten is an emphatic warning against public controversy. This was perhaps the first AA Tradition ever to take shape. Of course we did reserve that sometimes enjoyable right of quarreling among ourselves about lesser matters! But when it came to the awful issues that rock society about us, such as politics, religion, reform and the like—well, the early AAs knew these terrible conflicts were surely not for them.

Later on, a new aspect of this same peril came into view. All sorts of people and organizations begged us to "take stands," "deliver opinions," and "fight evils," all up and down the line. Again we instantly saw that if we ever embarked upon such a course, it would certainly be our finish. Drunks by the thousands would be kept away from AA through sheer prejudice. The same old peril would again menace us. This time it would crash in from the outside.

This was when we AAs knew for sure that we had to be at peace—internally, and with the world around

us. No doubt mankind has wrung many a freedom out of violent controversy and bitter war. Yet we AAs have had to learn that the kinds of freedom that *we must possess* cannot possibly be obtained by violence. As a fellowship, we cannot fight anybody, anywhere or at any time. This has been proved. When we had directly attacked John Barleycorn, we had lost. Booze fighting had never worked. When we quarrel too much with each other, we get drunk.

Hence genuine peace will always be a chief ingredient of AA's freedom. But let none suppose that we shrink from major conflict only because we are afraid. Nowadays we believe we keep the peace because we love each other.

Let's now examine that vital Tradition Eleven. It deals with our public relations. Here is our greatest channel of communication to the alcoholic who still suffers. Tradition Eleven reads: "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films." Since this great Tradition describes the most important application of AA's principle of anonymity, and because it sets the pitch and tone of our entire public relations policy, nothing can be more critically important. If personal ambitions ever invade our public relations we shall be badly crippled, perhaps lost altogether.

The danger, of course, is the possibility that we may one day reck-

lessly abandon the principle of personal anonymity at the top public level. This possibility arises from the fact that many of us AAs have been, and sometimes still are, possessed by enormous power drives. These are frequently fueled by an almost irresistible craving for money, approval, and public acclaim. My own past history is outstanding in this respect. I can well understand the constant temptation to turn one's self into a public figure. Therefore I have urged, in season and out, that we AAs maintain our personal anonymity at the top level, no matter what the personal sacrifices may be.

Our chief hope for the future is that these appalling urges of ours will be held in restraint by self-discipline, by love of AA, and by firm group and public opinion. These powerful constructive forces, all working together, have thus far been enough. We pray that they may always prevail.

Let's look once more at how immense this temptation really is. A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches. Granting all its huge public benefits, this limitless world forum is nevertheless a hunting ground for all those who would seek money, acclaim and power at the expense of society in general. Here the forces of good and evil are locked in struggle. All that is shoddy and destructive contests all that is best.

Therefore nothing can matter more to the future welfare of AA

than the manner in which we use this colossus of communication. Used unselfishly and well, the results can surpass our present imagination. Should we handle this great instrument badly, we shall be shattered by the ego demands of our own people—often with the best of intention on their part. Against all this, the *sacrificial spirit* of AA's anonymity at the top public level is literally our shield and our buckler. Here again we must be confident that love of AA, and of God, will always carry the day.

Lastly, in Tradition Twelve, we see "Anonymity as the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."

This principle, and its enormous implications, touches every aspect of our lives. Anonymity is humility at work. To maintain the humility of our society we shall constantly take stock of our temptations and of our defects. The spirit of anonymity calls upon each of us for personal sacrifice in every level of our fellowship's undertakings. Only through such willing sacrifices can we AAs meet our responsibilities to ourselves, to the victims of alcoholism everywhere, and to society as a whole. Here we clearly see that only sacrifice can fulfill responsibility; that only high responsibility can lead to mutual trust; and that only mutual trust can be the foundation for great love—each of us for the other, and all of us for God.

In just this spirit, all of those

present at AA's Twenty-fifth Anniversary in Long Beach rededicated themselves to the service of AA. They knew that the choice was theirs, and they made it. These were their telling words:

"By God's grace we are here assembled in grateful remembrance of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the founding of our fellowship.

"At this meaningful quarter-century mark we are deeply aware that we stand upon the threshold of a great door which opens wide into our future. Ours can be a destiny of ever-increasing promise and fulfillment. Our faith in this vision has never faltered.

"But the future would still lack its full use and meaning did it not bring us fresh problems and even acute perils—problems and perils through which we can grow into true greatness of action and spirit.

"To these ends we have pledged our lives and fortunes. We here rededicate ourselves to an ever deepening love of each other—love for the wondrous creation in which we live and serve, and love for its supreme Author, God Himself.

"We now entrust you of AA's distant reaches—you who so well symbolize the unique and loving communication that is ours in this universal fellowship—to carry this message to fellow members everywhere; and most especially to all those others who still know not, and who God willing, may soon issue out of their darkness into light."