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*The national monthly journal of Alcoholics Anonymous, devoted to those seeking further knowledge on the problem of alcoholism, with the hope that it will help all alcoholics everywhere. Individual opinions expressed here are not, necessarily, those of A.A. as a whole.*

## A Merry Christmas to Everyone!—And It Can Be

Many A.A. members create an unnecessary mental hazard for themselves over the approach of the Christmas and New Year holidays.

The newcomer, in particular, who has joined an A.A. group since the last holiday season is prone to spend some unhappy moments worrying about how to refuse a drink, and thus avoid a bender, when family and friends are participating in the Yuletide celebration. The problem often seems very real to him despite all he may have heard or learned about the application of the 24-hour plan. Habit is still a strong factor and his custom has been to get cock-eyed, perhaps without intent, on Christmas Eve and then to continue the binge well through New Year's Day, provided his endurance holds out.

### Prolonging the Accounting

Having very likely spoiled Christmas for the entire family, the alcoholic is usually bothered by remorse but not yet ready to face the unpleasant facts and the only escape seems to be to remain drunk for a few days longer. He rationalizes something in this manner: Isn't it the time of year to celebrate and won't employers be more lenient than usual if the job is neglected? Besides, aren't the members of the family a little intolerant of a chap's right to have fun when others are enjoying the season's good cheer?

The difficulty of coming through the holidays unscathed can be intensified for the new recruit to A.A. ranks by lack of understanding of the alcoholic illness on the part of relatives or friends. Without realization of the catastrophe they may bring about and often acting from the most hospitable motives, sometimes augmented by the few snorts they have indulged in themselves, these good people occasionally don't accept the A.A. member's first statement that he is just not drinking. They proceed to give

him the insidious argument, that Christmas or New Year's only comes around once a year and certainly a drink or two on such an occasion can't possibly hurt anyone. Perhaps for a moment his guard is lowered and John Barleycorn, always alert, gets in a swift one. In my personal experience in A.A., which includes four of these holiday seasons, the argument of the special occasion has been trotted out several times, by people who, I am certain, wish me well and who, furthermore, have good reason to know I have not handled liquor successfully for a long lime. (At other seasons of the year it doesn't occur to them to even offer me a drink, much less argue that I should take one.) I then have to quietly remind them that I am an alcoholic and that the calendar date has no bearing on that fact. In my experience, this

explanation suffices and, still a little puzzled perhaps, they at once become absorbed in their own drinking processes.

### No Exceptions

When Pearl Harbor came and, much later, when V-E and V-J days arrived, there were some timid souls who made dire predictions that the effect of such emotional events would be disastrous to the A.A. membership. Their fears were not well-grounded because the majority of members had so completely adopted the 24-hour plan of living. At the start of each of these days our minds, by long habit, had been made up not to drink on that particular day just as they had been for many days previously. Why then should we make any exception over war or peace? And, by the same token, why make any exception of Christmas or New Year's? It is fundamentally as simple as that. In approaching Christmas then, there are it seems to me, two important ideas to keep constantly before us: (1) We aren't going to have any fun if we take the first drink; and (2) we must make up our minds to refuse that drink before it is even offered to us (preferably at the beginning of each new day). If we adhere to those two simple principles we can have a really magnificent time over the holidays.

Certainly there is no need for us to be grim about our inability to hoist a few. For once, we will know what is going on about us and there are always many holiday parties in our groups or with our closest A.A. friends, where good cheer abounds without the adjunct of the wassail bowl. This year also, it seems, we can look forward to "Peace on earth" and we, who belong to the great company of A.A., should understand better than most the Christmas message, "Good Will Towards *Man*"—Abbott T., *Manhattan*.

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### The Lord's Prayer

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Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be Thy Name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. —Amen

# EDITORIAL:

## On the 2nd Step...

*"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."*

Here is the Step that makes the sugar in many an alcoholic's blood turn to acid. It is indeed the bitter with the sweet. Up to this point, the newcomer may have liked what he has heard about A.A. The 24-hour plan, the fellowship of others with the same problem, the familiarity of the language talked, the idea of helping still others — all of these things have appealed to him as logical, pleasant and practical.

But now comes "this God stuff!"

Not for him, he thinks. He can't take anything like that into his agnostic or atheistic system. He's allergic to anything "spiritual."

For many this is a serious mental obstacle that cannot be resolved merely by saying, "I believe," while really disbelieving.

The first three words of the Step as it is written suggest a wise approach. One of the most familiar of A.A. sayings can be applied. "Easy does it."

The words, "came to believe," imply a gradual process. "Easy does it."

For many the incline from the abyss of doubt and disbelief to the peaceful plateau of knowing is too steep to be made in one upward lunge. The climb must be made step by step.

First one begins with things more familiar than the unseen plateau is to the doubting alcoholic. Does he believe in honesty? In justice? In fellowship? In being a "right guy?" Surely he will admit that the sun rises every morning and he knows the stars are there in the sky even when he cannot see them through the clouds.

Then he does have faith in some things. Perhaps he will even agree that the influence of the A.A. group has a greater power than he has; at least it has helped sober up a good many alcoholics, which is more than he has been able to do for himself. Perhaps he can begin by believing that the power of 10 drunks who are dry is greater than that of one drunk who is still wet.

That's a feeble beginning but it's a beginning. It's the first break in the agnostic wall he has built around himself.

Practicing the 12th Step in particular will help to promote an understanding of the 2nd. It so often demonstrates the operation of a "Power greater than ourselves." No group of ex-drunks, or any other mortals, could alone bring about the miracles that are accomplished so often in 12th Step work.

Bit by bit, if not suddenly, even the most doubting will eventually be able to say, too, that he "came to believe."

"Easy does it" will do it for every newcomer if he keeps an open mind on the subject as he goes along in A.A.

The number is legion in A.A. who thought they would die before they ever could accept the 2nd Step and who now live by it, with deep thankfulness. — *D. T., Manhattan*

## *The Lost Weekend On Screen Retains Horror of the Book*

Those of us who read Charles Jackson's novel, *The Lost Weekend*, and groaned and sweated and shook over the agonizing memories it evoked, wondered how on earth anyone could ever expect to portray such personal, internal suffering in film. We knew it could be done in word, for there it was, the painfully true record of exactly how an alcoholic thought and felt and behaved during the course of a pretty typical alcoholic bender. The story of Don Birnam fitted most of us, closely enough. Even those of us who had not gone that far could recognize what would have been our inevitable future had we not accepted A.A. in time. Many of us had gone that far, and farther, and we could identify ourselves on nearly every page.

All that was true of the word picture. But how much of that could be filmed? Most of us didn't think it could be done at all, and we groaned when we heard that Hollywood was going to make a movie of the novel. There we'd be, we alcoholics, misunderstood yet again, we thought, pilloried for the public eye by people who couldn't possibly know what it all really meant.

That hasn't happened. A powerful, significant—and thrilling—movie has been made. The inner workings of an alcoholic's tortuous mind have somehow been clearly portrayed in pictures. A non-alcoholic actor has succeeded, in the mind of this reviewer, in translating in terms acceptable to *us*, the feeling of being an alcoholic. All the bafflement, the bewilderment, the hopeless struggle against an overpowering obsession, are there. Hollywood, putting on a show (and a superb show) has put across many of those truths that we have always thought only *we* understood. In short, Charles Jackson's shockingly true character study of one of us has been faithfully transposed into action in the finest piece of film-making seen in a very long time.

Anyone who has sweated out Don Birnam's trek with the typewriter and shuddered through his Bellevue experience (probably, like the writer, reliving his or her own similar past), will react tenfold to the graphic presentation of those episodes. It was painful enough reading, in Jackson's strong clear prose; it tore this alcoholic apart, seeing it through Ray Milland's magnificent portrayal. Jackson wrote about the horror of being an alcoholic as if from the inside. Milland plays the part the same way. And the sure touch of the script writers, Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, also the producer

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# WE'RE NOT PERFECT YET, BILL CAUTIONS AT BANQUET

A gentle but earnest reminder that "we still have plenty of faults" and that A.A. will continue to succeed only by adhering to the simple "principles of honesty, tolerance and humility" were the keynotes of Bill's talk at the 11th annual banquet in New York on Nov. 7.

Approximately 1,500 persons including hundreds of A.A.s from New York and out-of-town and their relatives and friends filled the Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Commodore for the affair which was sponsored this year by the New York Cosmopolitan Club. The non-A.A. guest speaker was the Rev. Father James P. Timmins of Manchester, Conn., who delivered a particularly dramatic and inspiring account of his personal observation of A.A. and its workers.

Besides Bill, other A.A. speakers were Connie M., and Bill F., with Greg M., serving as toastmaster following an introduction by Ed W., representing the Cosmopolitan Club.

Bill's talk coupled words of appreciation for the record to date with a plea that A.A., collectively and individually, hold steadfast to a singleness of purpose and not be diverted into the by-paths of extraneous matters and issues.

"Let us remember the seeming paradox that the more we give, the more we shall have," he said. "Of course, with us it is not only a question of giving but also of giving up. I had to give up the belief that I alone could solve my problem; had to give up some false pride; had to make amends, and had to put someone's interests ahead of my own. Most of all, I had to give up the idea of my own omnipotence, to gain a basis for faith in my fellowmen and faith in Him who presides over all."

Turning to a "stock-taking" of A.A.'s success, Bill cautioned that when riding a "wave of success it is difficult to appraise. We are apt to forget the thin line between success and failure. The same principles that apply to individuals should apply to the group and to our relations to the outside world. As individuals, we have negatives, as well as positives, active or latent. We're still pretty intolerant sometimes and frequently we're exhibitionists. We still have plenty of faults and I think perhaps our public reputation as a group is better than we are."

Bill stressed anonymity as one thing that has helped A.A. tremendously. Another he called "sideline leadership," which he explained as the development of an A.A. who becomes a leader in the group, stays dry, helps others and then steps aside. "By renouncing human authority he can become a spiritual influence" in the group.

Bill recalled the fate of the Washingtonians of 1840 who, after mushrooming to a claimed membership of 100,000, disintegrated as an organiza-

tion when they became embroiled in controversies resulting from a departure from their original objectives.

"They had no anonymity," he pointed out, "and competition for personal leadership became common. They engaged in politics. Their newspaper editors began to quarrel with each other and the outside world. In short, the Washingtonians went out to settle the world's affairs before they had learned to manage themselves. They had no capacity for minding their own business . . . The negatives within them overthrew the positives."

"That won't happen here," Bill urged in closing, "if we remember, publicly and privately, our own simple principles of honesty, tolerance and humility, and that we live only by the Grace of God."

Father Timmins began the most stirring part of his talk with an account of a "bedraggled, excited drunk — Fred — who nearly three years ago introduced me to one of the greatest social movements of modern times, a movement whose implications have not even begun to be realized by the world at large." He recalled the evening that the man "came into my rectory — and poured into my ears such a tale of bewilderment, confusion and utter despair as I have never before heard and to which I hope never to listen again. That night I looked into the mind of a man in hell..."

From there, Father Timmins traced the experience to an interview with Fred's family and then to a psychiatrist who steered them to A.A.

"Fred went ... to A.A. ... he had to fortify himself with a couple of drinks before venturing into this strange, unknown territory of an A.A. meeting. And here comes the marvel, the joyous unbelievable marvel . . . those were the last two drinks that Fred, the hopeless, irreclaimable drunk, has had from that day to this. I was confronted with the miracle of A.A. ..."

"Fred followed the correct road of the A.A., a road which other addicts must travel sooner or later, if in A.A. they are to arrest the ravages of their obsession. He had acquired what I consider the basic virtue necessary for any man who wants to work the A.A. program successfully, the virtue of humility.

"It is neither an abject nor a crawling virtue. As the word itself, from the Latin *humus* (the earth) signifies, it is a down-to-earth, realistic view of one's self, not as the center of the universe and the lord of the world, but as a very small and insignificant unit in the vast sea of humanity. When one looks at the matter objectively and not through the veils of self-deceit with which the alcoholic addict beclouds reality, humility is an active, common sense admission of a hard fact that nobody can shape the world to his liking, nor

even walk the ways of this world successfully in lonely independence.. But the alcoholic, isolated by his terrible pride, must needs try it."

The speaker frequently surprised the audience with the penetration and understanding of his analysis of the alcoholic.

"Who," he said at one point, "can depict that soul-searing loneliness of the alcoholic? He lives in the bosom of his family... but he is as remote from them as the inhabitant of another planet. They do not understand him nor he them. They look upon him as a heedless and irresponsible destroyer of their peace, a shirker of duty and a wilful devotee of the dreadful vice of drunkenness... To them, it seems a simple matter of using his common sense and will power. But the alcoholic knows it is not. He knows that he is driven by some incomprehensible compulsion. So his sensitive soul shrinks into itself. He lies and evades and cheats to protect it from the painful wounds inflicted on it not only by his family, but by his friends and his associates in the business and social world. Even in the midst of those who love him, he lives alone, with no remedy against the stark terrors of isolation save the old enemy, the anaesthetic alcohol."

In referring to the "religious element" in A.A., Father Timmins observed, "Seven of the 12 Steps in the A.A. way of life refer to God... All that I can say is, that the Higher Power in those seven Steps... grows upon an alcoholic, even if he has little or no religion at all... In A.A., if the addict does his work well and sincerely, something happens. The self-god is toppled from its pedestal and in its place a new image begins to take form. It is the shape of a Power... which... becomes an ever-increasing reality in his life... "

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## *ABC Commentator Gives Outsider's View Of Our Activities*

A particularly vivid and life-like description of A. A. was heard over the American Broadcasting Company stations Nov. 14, during the regular evening broadcast by George Hicks, noted correspondent who gained special fame for his D-Day broadcasts from Normandy. Mr. Hicks visited the national headquarters office in New York, the New York clubhouse where he listened in on conversations and a meeting, and then told, in strikingly forceful words, the story of A. A. and the importance which it apparently is assuming in varied walks of life.

# ST. PAUL'S FOUR DISCUSSION GROUPS

## *A Method of Outlining A. A. to New Members*

*(Continuing the series outlining the various plans and methods followed by different groups throughout the country.)*

The present plan of discussions for new members in the St. Paul Group, with modifications during use, has been in operation for seven months. At its inception, about a dozen persons interested in the work met and formulated a tentative plan based on the experience of one of the squads and the material presented in the Washington, D. C., pamphlet and obtained from other sources.

Four discussions covering the A.A. program were outlined. Two members for each of these prepared and presented their discussions before the remainder of the group. Critical attention to these "previews" enabled each individual to reorganize or rewrite his discussion so that it would contain what the group as a whole considered an adequate presentation of the subject on the basis of their collective experience and what they knew of experiences elsewhere.

In general, the plan is to cover the A.A. program as clearly, concisely and completely as possible in four 45 minute discussions, with time for questions at the end of each. The arrangement of the club rooms permits all four discussions to be presented at one time, each in a separate room, every Wednesday evening. New members are urged to attend all of the sessions in the proper order. It is emphasized each time that the discussions are not to replace any other A.A. activity, but to supplement them and to serve as an outline into which the new member can fit his past experiences, his present objectives and his progress toward these objectives.

At every meeting the three objectives of A.A. are kept before the group: 1. To attain and maintain the FACT OF SOBRIETY.

2. To RECOVER from those things which caused us to drink. •

3. To HELP OTHERS who want what we have.

By adherence to simplicity in concept and in presentation in all discussions, we try to give aid to the new member in understanding how to progress toward these objectives.

Attendance at discussions indicates the accomplishment of the fact of sobriety, so that emphasis is placed on a Program of Recovery. Each of the 12 Steps is considered in respect to its place in the whole program rather than for its value *per se*. The four discussions are integrated each time by brief review of what was covered before and preview of what is to be the content of discussions to follow.

Questions are encouraged at the end of the discussions and frequently require as much time as the discussion. Some attempt is made to consider questions of general interest here, while other questions seem best referred to discussion with the sponsors or others who may be better able to give help on them.

Older members also are urged to attend discussions and many do attend. Their contributions in the question period are very valuable. The plan in the present stage of evolution seems to show sufficient improvement over earlier methods to justify its approval for another six-months period. It is our hope that we can continue to progress in this as one of the ways of helping others.

Discussion No. I: The Admissions:

1. The admission of alcoholism, as a result of our experiences with it—what we are and how we got that way.
2. The admission that we want to do something about it—the qualification for A.A. membership.
3. The belief that we can obtain help—which is not debatable.

A brief outline of the purpose and scope of the discussions is stated. A brief history of A.A. and a statement of the motives, methods and scope is made. A short consideration of what constitutes an alcoholic and a statement of alcoholism as a disease, along with the progress in public thinking about alcoholics and alcoholism, are included. The objectives in A.A. membership are pointed out and certain mechanisms for getting over the tough spots are mentioned.

This material is covered by each of the persons giving this discussion according to his own methods and is varied to meet the needs of the group present so far as possible. At the end, each new member is given a small card. On one side of this card is a list of the activities at the club rooms for each night in the week, with the address of the club rooms. At the top is a reminder—"I made a 24-Hour Deal Today," at the bottom—"Easy Does It."

On the reverse side of the card is an outline of the Program of Recovery, which is also the outline of the discussions. Space is provided for the name and telephone number of the sponsor and co-sponsor. The new member is also given a single sheet of information about the St. Paul group and other brief information which may be of value to him.

Discussion No. II: Inventory and Restitution: The steps concerned with inventory are read

and discussed with regard to what constitutes an inventory, how to go about it and when to do it. Emphasis is on honesty, thoroughness, clear thinking and "follow through" in practicing the 10th Step. Restitution is approached in the same fashion and the steps concerned are discussed as means to an end. The 5th Step is mentioned as a further aid in self-understanding and as a way to do something about our character analysis.

Discussion No. III: Spiritual Aspects of the Program:

Steps 2, 3, 5, 7 and 11 are read and discussed in their relation to our objectives to the remainder of the program. Open mindedness, tolerance and personal understanding of a Higher Power are stressed as essential to progress in this part of the program. "Easy Does It" is the watchword in this discussion.

The 12th Step is used as the basis of a summary of the Program of Recovery, as our "insurance" in A.A. and as a way of living in keeping with normal human behavior and experience. The three parts of the 12th Step are discussed separately.

1. Spiritual experience is discussed as sudden conversion to a new way of life or the more common result of the cumulative effects of all experiences in working at the program which result in a personality change: Continuance of spiritual experience is emphasized.

2. Making calls on prospective members is cited as only one of the things considered in working with others. Personal aggrandizement, zeal to reform and increased membership are discussed as unsuitable reasons for making calls. Sincerity of purpose in helping others, humility in the knowledge of our own power to help, and confidence in our understanding of our capacities in A.A. are indicated as states of mind likely to help in working with others!

3. The last part of the 12th Step is discussed as a way of life that encompasses our motives, our methods and our accomplishments in A.A. It insures continuance of sobriety, happiness in what we do and peace of mind in the knowledge that we are progressing in our Program of Recovery with the help of a "Power greater than ourselves."—*L.S.L., St. Paul, Minn.*

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### **Books for Public Library**

The Norwalk, Conn., Group has bought and sent two copies of the A. A. book to the public library of that city. Each book has been stamped on the back cover with the address and phone number of the Norwalk meeting-room. It is hoped thus to reach people who are interested in A. A. but do not know where information can be obtained.

## A.A. at Work for the Seamen

In reference to my work at Seamen's Church Institute in Manhattan, I submit an analysis briefly covering the rudimentary details of my job, including a typical case history.

I think I may best explain my relations with these men who reach me by presenting them as a group, as their individual experiences are strikingly similar. These men, for varying reasons, have been drinking for periods of from a few days to several weeks, have, for the most part, been in fights and arguments, usually requiring both medical and surgical attention. Their money is invariably gone, papers lost or stolen, and many are on the verge of the "shakes" or delirium tremens. At this stage I take them to the alcoholic ward at Bellevue Hospital, where they are kept from one to three or more days until their medical condition is corrected and their appetite at least partially restored.

Upon release from the hospital many are placed in a rest center for an additional period. Others are given lodging and meals, and a temporary shore job until they are once again fit to return to sea duty. While attending to their immediate needs, I also take care of their personal problems of every nature, assist them in their financial dealings, and, perhaps most important to them, obtain duplicates of their papers, which usually takes from one to two weeks. As the majority of these men lose even their personal belongings and become untidy and disheveled, it falls to me to replace their gear from razor and comb to new clothing.

After attending to their obviously important, immediate needs I then approach them with the A.A. program, give them literature to read, invite them to meetings, and endeavor in every way possible to sincerely interest them in the movement. I am very happy to be able to state that the great majority of these men not only take an active part in the A.A. program but many even bring in their former friends and drinking companions. Often, under the strong psychological influence that a return to sobriety brings, a great number of these men once again turn to religion.

To further clarify the preceding explanation, I cite the following typical case history of one of the many young seamen with whom I have worked. This seaman, who had been on a prolonged three week drinking bout, finally ended up where they all do, at the Credit Bureau, which referred him to me. Because of his jittery nerves and inability to eat, I personally took him to Bellevue Hospital where he remained a few days. I then called for him, brought him back to the Institute, got him food, lodging

## THE PLEASURES OF READING

*The Gauntlet* by James Street (Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., \$2.75).

When London Wingo, with his wife Kathie, "a tiny, merry rain-drop of a girl", left the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to take up his church in Linden, Missouri, he was proud, and full of high hopes for the future. "This was the beginning of the search, the first journey of the quest. That wasn't a greasy engine. It was a white horse with gold trimmings.' And those weren't cold rails...." they were "the broad highway to out yonder where truth and spiritual peace, imprisoned by Beelzebub, were waiting to be freed by God's chosen knight. He wasn't going to a grubby little town in Missouri. He had an appointment in Zion, a rendezvous with truth on a mountain top."

What London and Kathie found in Linden was, at first sight, a far cry from a heady, exhilarating, clean breeze on a lofty peak. While he made plans to feed his hungry and admiring flock with God's kind but astute wisdom as interpreted and orated by him, the flock had other plans, plans to pour the young preacher and his flighty little wife into the traditional mold of Linden, a stifling, circumscribed mold walled by the rigid iron wills of the people in the small Missouri town, petty, spiteful, greedy, jealous, generous, warm-hearted, all the faults and virtues of any group of people, any place in the world.

The preacher with the arrogance of youth walked ruthlessly and directly toward his goal leaving "undone those things he ought to have done" and doing "those things he ought not to have done" and at times there would have been no health in him had it not been for the intercession of his friend and predecessor, Brother Honeycutt and the gentle wisdom of Kathie, whom Sister Moffatt and Sister Ducksworth called Katherine, giving to her name the "solid worth" which they thought lacking in her character.

That Brother Wingo was stung and frustrated by the nettles and harriers put in his path is a foregone conclusion. How he adjusted himself to his people as they were and gave up trying to make them puppets who would kneel in hushed awe to his theological theories and ideals is the story that James Street tells in *The Gauntlet*. The good Baptists of Linden, Missouri, might be any group of people brought into close contact with one another—even any group of A.A.s.

London left Texas searching for the broad highway leading to the peak of Ararat, the mountain of Peace. He found that the road was not broad and straight. It was narrow, rough and steep, at times, full of by-ways and cul de sacs. It wound its way through strange country where he was lost and lonely and hurt. The seller of faith found his own faith sorely tried as he scaled the disciplinary crags of Mount Sinai, and wandered through the troublesome terrain of the Valley of the Jordan. He learned the hopeful lesson of the Mount of Olives and the bitter lesson of Gethsemane before he reached the place where finally it could be said of him: "He was mellowing, retaining his pride, but losing his vanity; increasing his confidence while conquering his deceit". He found a "faith that could not be weighed on scales or proved by a formula". Faith itself, was a formula and "out of the faith come love and truth, and out of truth comes peace". Then—at long bitter last—London kept his "rendezvous with truth on a mountain top". —Lois K., *White Plains*

*Mr. Littlejohn* by Martin Flavin (Harper & Bros., \$2.50 and also Penguin Books, 25 cents) is plain fun and good relaxation for anybody. It hasn't anything to do with alcoholics or A.A. excerpt that Mr. Littlejohn comes pretty close to the same kind of conclusions that characterize those who practice A.A. It's a thoroughly charming look into a man's mind and his quest for the answer to life—just the type of entertainment that makes a perfect Christmas stocking gift. —K. Y.

*Alcoholics Anonymous* (Works Publishing Co., Box 459, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, N. Y., \$3.50).

and duplicates of his papers. As a result of a hold-up a year ago, he was sent to the Marine Hospital for some extensive dental and plastic surgery which necessitated his staying ashore for several additional months. As he was a former painter, he was able to obtain a job in New York as a painter, and immediately paid back his debt incurred at the Institute. At this

stage, he realized that he was a ready prospect for the A.A. movement, and he became very active, speaking at various meetings, and bringing in as new members several of his old acquaintances. After the conclusion of his treatment at the Marine Hospital, he had become an active A.A. member, had been sober over four months, and has returned to sea.—Bill F.

# Mail Order Therapy Builds Bridge from Isolation

A year ago I was a hopeless alcoholic. I tried to stop drinking, but the harder I tried the more I drank. I drank to get drunk. I drank to stay sober. And I couldn't do either.

Alcoholics Anonymous jerked me back to reality.

Having only a vague knowledge of Alcoholics Anonymous, I did manage to part the haze in my head long enough to remember that its headquarters was in New York City. I wrote them, pleading on the envelope: "New York Postmaster: Please find these people for me. I am a veteran of World Wars I and II. I need help!" I was drunk when I wrote. Later I was told that when the postman delivered the letter to the New York office of Alcoholics Anonymous he said: "We found you for the soldier. Now you fix him up."

That started A. A.'s letters. I was remotely located, beyond personal contact with the organization or any of its branches. But — from Alcoholics Anonymous, P. O. Box 459, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, N. Y. — the letters came to me in an unbroken flow, often daily, most of them by air mail and many by air mail special delivery. They were written in terms I could understand and pulled no punches. When I wasn't sure I wanted to come back — after my wife died — they sensed my wavering and worked hard and earnestly through the mails.

## Liquid Crutch

I do not believe in excuses and make none, but there were certain reasons for my drinking. Caught in a grind that kept me exhausted, I drank for energy. Liquor became a crutch upon which I leaned more and more heavily.

I had been honorably discharged from the Marine Corps and was working at night. My son, who was with the Army Air Force in China, dropped out of contact for months. My wife was gravely ill and we had no one to help except visiting nurses and my daughter who worked during the day.

After my wife died I set about drinking continuously for escape. Once I chanced upon a quantity of chemically pure alcohol, 190 proof and the ultimate in shocking power: This liquid fire blotted out pain of remembrance and physical discomforts that still bothered me from old Army injuries and a recent Marine Corps broken arm.

One rainy night a hit-and-run driver ran over me, left me lying on the highway and escaped. Later a truck just missed me. The driver stopped and called an ambulance. Not the least of my injuries were skull fractures.

After weeks in the hospital the day finally came when I could walk by using a cane. I set out to hunt a drink. I found drinking with head injuries made walking difficult — at hundred-yard intervals

the world dissolved. There was no sensation of falling; the deck simply rushed up and hit me. There must have been a dozen such falls before a minister found me spattered with blood and head laid open.

## Solitary, In Jail or Out

There wasn't much I missed in the misadventures of alcoholics in advanced stages of the disease. I tried to re-enlist, seeking overseas assignment, but could not make the grade again because of alcoholism. Frustrated but fiery I became involved in street fights and frequently fell afoul of the police. Often I awoke in a solitary cell removed from other prisoners and writhing in the excruciating pain of alcoholic neuritis. I was generally unaware of how I got there. With nothing to do, all I thought about was getting out, getting a drink to blot out the humiliation of the experience. Under treatment usually accorded hard drinkers — such as 30 hours solitary confinement, which is dreadful medicine for any disease — alcoholism thrives.

Alone in the house one night, I crept to the kitchen to seek a hidden bottle. Mistaking the cellar door for the cupboard, I fell down the stairway. Hours later I returned to consciousness and saw our three cats silhouetted against the open door of the furnace, watching me. This was one time in my life that I was ashamed to face animals. Their silent, stolid, questioning gaze was more effective than the rebuke of any person.

Crisis impended now. The doctor did not have to say, "It's killing you." I knew it. I did not want to let my children down. I cut down on liquor one day only to drink harder the next. There was no out in the gray half-world I existed in. Somewhere in the depths of my mind there stirred a remote recollection of Alcoholics Anonymous. Grasping at this straw I wrote that first letter.

## If You Want It

When the reply came from A. A., it was brief but reassuring: "A. A. will work *if* you want it to work." That threw a lot of responsibilities right back in my lap, but wanting it to work was what I wanted most. Continuing, this letter said: "The requirement for membership in Alcoholics Anonymous is simply the sincere desire to stop drinking, and you certainly seem to have that. We will be most happy to do all possible to help you, and of course there is absolutely no charge at all for any service." Wishing me luck, they asked me to write again.

My doctor had told me he could do very little to help me unless I was willing to cooperate. After reading this letter, I called him and told him I was ready. He took over — we were off!

One point in particular from the booklets the

organization sent me proved to be the key to the whole plan: "Get up in the morning determined that you will not have a drink throughout the day. Don't say you will never drink. Just concern yourself with *this day*." It made sense. They followed it up with a philosophical quote: "Tomorrow's sun will rise. Until it does we have no stake in tomorrow, for it is as yet unborn. This leaves only today. Any man can fight the battles of just one day."

Days went by and I was standing fast. It was a fight. There was more here than a state of mind, and that is where the doctor came in. He used sedatives but not the barbiturates (the so-called sleeping capsules) and thiamin hydrochloride (B1) by intravenous or intramuscular administration, to steady my nerves and help my appetite.

But a tiger stalked me — a nostalgia that only liquor would remove — thoughts of things that had happened way back in my past. A.A. sensed this and, with its usual discernment, asked me to think this over: "God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, courage to change things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." That made a profound impression on me.

## Keeping Step

A reader and haunter of libraries, I could have found this sort of thing for myself, but it was more telling in the way it came from A.A. They were keeping step with me; we swung along together. Sitting at the typewriter, I could look over the open fields and see the mail planes pass, wondering if they had brought letters for me. I would picture the progress of letters, by train or plane, their arrival here. Finally the mailman would arrive with a message, the answer to some question like this: "When 'the feeling' torments you, eat sweets even if the idea repels you. It's good medicine. Alcoholics are used to great quantities of sugar in their systems, and when you stop drinking you cut off the supply."

An alky, when he refers to "the feeling," means that dreadful compulsion to drink. A.A. assured me that it would grow easier, which is true. It comes to me now in cycles. About every three weeks I go through one of them with restlessness and yearning. Under stress, this may continue for more than a week. The 24-hour idea helps tremendously. I can always manage a day at a time and let tomorrow take care of itself.

One day a letter came, saying: "Most people seeking psychological help from abnormal drinking are above average intellectual endowment; and while drinking means failure, abstinence is likely to mean success." Who knows? At any rate, being dry provides time for writing and I am on the road back.

The battle was not won immediately. I had two

## to Sobriety

slips. A slip is a serious set-back, but it does not mean that you are lost. A.A. and the doctor agreed that a slip is not uncommon at the start. That gave me heart. It was pointed out that I had to avoid controversy, because any emotional crisis is likely to precipitate a slip. That being exactly what happened in both cases, I learned to avoid issues. Excitement due to good news may prove as disastrous as that due to bad news. Overconfidence, I discovered, is dangerous and A.A. wrote that I might never be nearer my first drink than when I felt absolutely certain that I had won the fight and could not be tempted. This made me watchful.

Letters always arrived when a crisis was pending, providentially at times, expertly timed, always bright and frequently sprightly. At the beginning of the correspondence two people were in touch with me, but this soon narrowed down to one. One person could maintain closer liaison, foresee problems coming and prepare me for them. If there was a delay in mail, I ran over the dossier of former letters and found comfort in them. There was no one else from whom I could get such understanding; my safety lay entirely in the letters.

Recently there were several pretty bad days. I was frightened, and I wrote A.A. The answer was, "In the first place, will you *please* calm down I!! By the time I finish reading one of the letters you write when you're excited, I'm fit material myself for a padded cell." They asked me to check again with the doctor.

One week I was wavering on the edge, and A.A. knew it. I saw a mail plane go over and wished fervently for a letter. Soon after the plane had passed there was a rap at the door — special delivery air mail: "Don't talk so negatively about this thing taking more than you've got. I thought the Marines never stopped fighting." That one made me bristle, snapped me back, for I'm proud to have been a Marine.

### No Pushing or Preaching

I know the letters brought results where all else failed, because no one else, family or friends, could make effective pleas. A.A.s talked a language I understood; they too were alkie. Kindly argument by my son and daughter had a tremendous impact. I would be ashamed and angry with myself; but then, unable to find a way out, I would drink harder in a desperate attempt to forget it all. Acquaintances and friends offered well-meant advice. Their palter was, "Be a man." People seem unable to grasp the fact that alcoholism is a disease, that there is just as much reason to berate a person for breaking a leg or having cardiac trouble.

The technique of A.A., I discovered, was not to push, nor even to lead, but to walk with you and offer you something you needed — if you wanted to



**"All right! Sign your poems 'Anonymous'—but I have to know who you are!"**

Reprinted from *Saturday Review of Literature*

accept it. There was no argument, no controversy. There is no concern, either, about temperance interests; they are not reformers. Neither are they concerned with race or creed. The letters made this clear. They do, however, feel it highly important that you have some belief in a power greater than yourself, because this fact of belief, of something to lean on, makes the fight easier. There is no preaching. Just a suggestion.

"What the hell's the use of all this?" I asked in one of my letters.

"You'll eventually get the answer to that," A.A. replied. "You've got a lot of years left. Why not make them worth while? There are other people like yourself you can help, and there's nothing like helping others in order to forget yourself."

During the period I had been drinking, hard, like all drinkers I hid bottles for that rainy day when my stock might be gone. Quite by accident I stumbled upon one recently, in the morning of one of my bad days. I looked at it, then hastily put it away, but fascination drew me back to it. I swished the liquor around in the bottle, held it up to the light, smelled it. I wondered if it would be possible to take one drink, and imagined myself pouring a tumbler half full of the liquor, filling it up with water and sipping it slowly to savor the fragrance and satisfying sharpness. I grew taut

as a violin string which is about to snap.

But as the morning wore on, the mail man was coming closer. He finally reached me, with a long A.A. letter. At the very end was this amazing paragraph:

"A thought for you. You *know* that you're an alky and will never be anything else. *But* do you know that some A.A.s, after the pressure has been lifted, think: 'Well, maybe now I could take just a drink or two and stop there.' If you *ever* come to this stage, before you take that first drink just sit down and *remember!* That's all! Remember! One drink is too much, a thousand not enough."

I shuddered to think how close I had been to disaster, and was mystified by the chance guidance and timing which had brought that particular message at the moment it came.

I am not a religious man, but in the course of my return from the half-world of alcoholism I began to perceive the intervention of some outside force. I began to see that this force was working in my behalf and that I could avail myself of it. The change which A.A. helps a man accomplish is close to the religious experience of conversion: Indeed, it is the same if it is genuine and lasts.

I do not pretend to know all about this force.

(Continued on Page 10)

## Piccadilly Peccadillos

To beer or not to beer was the question last Christmas in London, England, as the buzz bombs were also falling. When you reach the "quiz kid" stage you are already drunk, so to make it formal I sought my safety in the suds and ended up on an atomic drunk more terrifying than the bombs.

Let's see, how did it rationalize? The British beer was weak, watery and Al Jolson had said you oughta pour it back into the horse. You couldn't take it with you, so it couldn't hurt your system much. With a war on (and war is hell, dontchaknow?) what's a mild hangover ... since no one would know.

And wasn't England the controlled drinkers' paradise? How could you get drunk when the pubs didn't open until noon, closed at three in the afternoon... then reopened at five and closed at nine P.M.? Nine P.M., mind you (a pity we didn't do something like that at home; we used most of their laws, didn't we?).

It was this two hour period in the afternoon, these hours of grace that kept you from going overboard. Oh, yes, you might mill around loose-kneed on the Mall a bit, but so what, if you had your dignity? And you could always go into a tea house and gulp buckets of scalding ten to calm your nerves. And with the beer matinee plus the tea-time tonic you had a beautiful base built for combined operations as of an evening... beer and nips of nayvee rum if you could get much. It would be fun while playing darts.

Well, it was simply wonderful the first few days. I didn't get into many fights, the buzz bombs rattled the windowpanes and creaked the

beams to the scams, but didn't interfere with my buzz . . . and true philosophy came back into my life agayne. But the beer made a direct hit.

What I hadn't counted on was my charming pub manners. Made too many uppa clawss friends who were always mucking and gadding about. They introduced me into the local angles but fast. Which meant we taxied to their private clubs as soon as the pubs closed as our conversation had simply been out of this world. Hands across the sea of booze stuff.

At the clubs you could obtain high gravity ales. Scotch, vodka, rum and gin in quantity, but alas, you couldn't get any American rye or Bourbon or iced beer. After the clubs closed at two A.M. there were 'bottle parties' at home or the clip joints that never closed.

Could anyone reading this finish the story? Yes, with all the details. Except that a copy of *The Grapevine* reached me some days later at my lowest point. And reading it over and over, particularly a piece by the present editor who had just reached the States and had related his English slip among the buzz bombs, helped me get off the daily pub crawl. Just in time to escape AWOL and court-martial. I had almost lost hope.

Well, the lights are on again this Christmas and the bombs are not falling. But the beer flashes know no armistice and John B. is a great guerrilla fighter. On the first flash . . . hit that phone booth and call your A.A. friends. With us, mere beer will always be a delayed action bomb with a short fuse.—Sgt. *Hugh B., Manhattan.*

## Barley !!! CORN!!!

*(What's the funniest A.A. tale or quip you've heard? Others would like to hear it. Send it in.)*

One of our returned veterans says it was sometimes hard for him to tell whether he suffered most from battle fatigue or bottle fatigue.

\* \* \*

An alcoholic is one who drinks TWICE AS MUCH of what he shouldn't drink HALF AS MUCH of as the fellow who drinks NOTHING.

\* \* \*

She said accusingly:

"I saw you coming out of McCarthy's saloon last night!"

Said he blearily:

"Well, I had to come out sometime."

\* \* \*

Speaking of alcoholic rationalizing: He was on a binge but was trying to taper off. He thought of wine. Ah, that's the stuff! It's not as strong as whiskey. Why, he said profoundly to himself, sherry, for instance, is only 20 percent in alcoholic content. Then he thought a bit more. Only 20 percent? Mmm. . . . And so he got two instead of one bottle of sherry!

\* \* \*

He was fairly new in A.A. and still thought he'd done the most terrible things imaginable.

"Why, you know what I did once?" he said to a group of A.A.s. "It was awful. My wife and I had a pretty little bungalow and I went on a binge and sold it."

"Aw, that's nothing," said an oldtime A.A. "We had an eight-room house and I sold it and the furniture, too."

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## THERE'S NO DOUBLE STANDARD IN ALCOHOLISM OR A. A.

I sat jittering in Bill's office. My psychiatrist had sent me to see Bill.

I had said to her: "Good. I'd like to meet him. Wouldn't it be fun to get him to take a drink?"

She laughed a nice easy laugh. She said, "You couldn't get *him* to take a drink."

I heard that. It stayed with me. You couldn't get *him* to take a drink.

So I, the girl who was going to get Bill to take a drink, now sat here, talking to Bill.

He told me a few things, the fundamentals. I heard all of those things, too. Then he made a phone call. He wrote a name and an address on a slip of paper.

"Here is an alcoholic girl," he said. "Why don't you go and see her? Now?"

I fell for that. I said, "Is she still drinking?"

"No," he said, "but she will always be an alcoholic just the same. Just as I am; just as you say you are."

I didn't know where I was going, or what to expect. I didn't expect an attractive apartment. I didn't expect the girl who answered the door — Helen, a friend of Marty's — to be like that. I was a sight and a mess. She didn't notice it. She talked, to me as though I were an acquaintance who had dropped in. Time passed. Marty came in.

"I spent six months in Bellevue and a year in Blythewood," she announced. "I used to go to cheap bars on Third Avenue, when my money ran out. If I had no money, I could always 'borrow' drinks from men."

Marty had sized me up. To another new-

comer, she might have talked gently, asking questions. She knew that for me this would be wrong. She talked and talked. She didn't stop. I, who had feared to speak, couldn't get a word in edgewise. I tried a couple of times. No soap. She was a girl with my sort of background. She and Helen both had my tastes and interests (that is, what I still fondly considered my tastes and interests. I really had none but liquor and self abasement).

I sat there and listened. Two women like myself. They were like me. They drank the way I did. Especially Marty. Marty, who like me, had gone to cheap bars. At last, someone else who was as "horrible" as I was. And she was horrible no longer.

I heard every word Marty and Helen said.

*(Continued on Page 12)*

# Mail Call for All A.A.s at Home or Abroad

Letters to this department are invited on any subject pertinent to A.A. Due to space limitations you are asked to hold your letters to a maximum of 350 words.

Only initials will be published unless the writer authorizes use of his first name as identification for A.A. friends.

*The Grapevine* will not divulge the full name of any writer but will forward A.A. communications addressed to the writers of letters published here. —The Editors.

## 12th Step Key to Slips

*From Baltimore, Md.*

In the October issue, where the 12th Step was so ably discussed, little space was devoted to the last part of the sentence which reads, "and to practice these principles in *all our affairs*." Don't you think this one suggestion is an important key to why A.A. works? In pur drinking days we became dishonest, selfish liars, devoid of religion and any interest in our fellowman other than to squeeze another drink out of him. It naturally follows, then, that after becoming physically sober we must go to work on the other kindred faults. I feel that in some measure this might also answer the inquiry, also contained in the October issue, as to the cause of so-called "slips." It is very difficult, if not utterly impossible, to remain sober for very long if we attempt to retain any of the other evils which generally associate themselves with drinking. We feel that for a man to stop drinking and then continue to steal, in any way, or to continually break the natural laws, is to travel on very thin sober ice. Several of us members while driving into a meeting recently came to the conclusion that a man who has a slip doesn't really slip at all. He has just decided that he wants to get drunk once more. Certainly he learned early in A.A., to his own satisfaction, that he couldn't take even one drink. Wouldn't it therefore follow that it would be an insult to his intelligence to say that he "slipped" in the light of this knowledge? No, he didn't slip—he deliberately *reached*. Possibly if he had paid more attention to the final words of the 12th Step, "and to practice these principles in all our affairs," he would have been less likely to have "reached."

I might state, further, that I attended A.A. meetings from June, 1944, until the Tenth Anniversary banquet at the Commodore in October of last year before I stopped reaching. It was only after arriving at the banquet with a load on, and the ride on the Pennsy back to Baltimore that I decided to put all I had into a dry effort. Thus far it has been happily successful.—*D.H.N.*

## Like Full Sunlight

*From Abilene, Texas*

I think you will understand that one of the worst parts of this Army for me is that for nearly two years now I have been stationed where it was impossible to maintain personal contact with other A.A.s and have had to go it alone. I thank God that so far I have not taken the first drink.

My own career as an alcoholic began with my first drink of whiskey as an undergraduate at Princeton in 1931 and built up steadily over a period of ten years until, on the verge of a "wet brain," I ended a two-week drunk by collapsing, quite by chance, on the front walk of an old family friend who had read of A.A. and told me the story instead of calling the police. In desperation (I had been given up as hopeless by family and doctors) I decided to grasp at this last straw.

My first meeting was with the Newark (N.J.) Group in April of 1941. Later, after being drafted, I was stationed for nearly a year in Miami and was a member of the group there. I have also attended meetings in Denver and Atlanta, but as I said, for two years now it has been chiefly a lone hand.

In all this time A.A. has never failed me. Not only have I still not taken that first drink, but it has made possible a happy marriage and us normal a life as war would allow.

At first A.A. meant learning to live all over again—a bringing of my eyes out of darkness to see and recognize beauty, a flexing, almost physical, of stiffened fingers, an awareness and enjoyment of life that had been lost to me for years, and a return to realization of the mercy of God. For me it was almost literal rebirth like emergence from a dark and hellish tunnel into full sunlight.—*E. B., Sgt., AAF.*

## Plea for Simplicity

*From Manhattan*

I must object mildly and without rancor to the charge made by M.L. of the Genesee Group, in your November issue, that I misquote. So please permit me to refute such charge by direct quotations from the Genesee-Manhattan exchange of letters appearing in your September, October, and November issues, relating to the Rochester plan for the education of novices in A.A., such quotations being as follows:

September letter from M.L.—Genesee: "There he [the novice] listens to four successive talks based on the 12 Steps and the Four Absolutes." October letter (mine): "... speaking for

myself, I do not like the reference to the Four Absolutes in the same sentence with the 12 Steps."

November letter from M. L. —Genesee: "They [A.T. and myself] both went outside the letter for their criticisms.... They both took exception to the Four Absolutes (*not mentioned in the letter*), J.D. because, in a booklet prepared by our group... we used... the words Four Absolutes in the same sentence with the 12 Steps."

From the above it will appear that the Four Absolutes were mentioned in M.L.'s first letter, and my comment was directed only to the letter, since I have not yet read the Genesee booklet, so that I could not have been referring to it.

Reduced to its essence, the substance of my so-called criticism is simply this: The ordinary novice comes into A.A. bewildered and confused in mind. In the normal case, all that the older members can hope to do is to give him an inkling of... the A.A. program—Honesty, Humility, and Helpfulness. Why confuse him in the early stages with the much more difficult concepts of Absolute Love, Absolute Purity, and Absolute Unselfishness? Later on he may be able to embody these more abstruse concepts in his basic A.A. philosophy of life.... But do not make it too tough for him by stressing, as essential, any dogma or, for that matter, any specific creed.... If, with the help of the older members and by the Grace of God, he gets the elements of A.A., he will, at the same time (and perhaps without even recognizing it), obtain the essential content of what is good in all orthodox religions.—*(./-)*.

## "The Greater Power"

*From Manhattan*

Many A.A. members, particularly new ones, apparently find belief in a greater power a major stumbling block in the acceptance of the program. Yet it can be demonstrated that there lies in ourselves, in the subconscious, a greater power than exists in our conscious selves.

It is generally conceded by the best authorities that most of the neuroses and mental quirks that show up in our later lives were first instilled in childhood. These were impressed on our subliminal minds by shock, falls, ghost stories and a host of other things. Many of us can trace some of our unwelcome feelings of today back to the causative factor in childhood. The writer can trace his present unreasoning fear of high places to a painful fall from a high pillar when he was six years old. Yet there were many

*(Continued on Page 10)*

## Mail Order Therapy

(Continued from page 7)

It is too young yet in me and too ill-formed to talk about clearly, but I know it is there. It came to me slowly, during long solitary walk? in the country. I began to feel that life must have some design. So I tried to pray to whatever may be back of all this, and I've come to believe that there is something finally guiding me, some good force turning me.

Sometimes, cast down by tragic events, I wondered if the fight was worth carrying on. A.A. got some inkling of this from one letter I wrote on a gray day. I was planning then to go to New York soon. They wrote: "Come, and head straight for A.A. It's true, you do need personal contact ... nothing like a good straight talk."

The morning I left for New York an air mail special delivery came (they were coming daily before I left) remarking: "You've got the big thing, Sincerity. That means so much. And you've gotten back on the road to health. I have only to glance at our correspondence to see how much progress you have made mentally. So, please just take it easy. We will be expecting you."

People in the A.A. office were as curious to see me as I was to see them. They had had lots of correspondence with individuals, most of it resulting in successful conclusions, but usually these other people had found it possible to join a group of A.A.s in or near their home towns. My isolation had prevented personal contacts.

Once an Alcoholic, Always—

In our conversations the office people told me that since I have become an alcoholic I can never be anything else. Not an ex-alcoholic, but always an alcoholic who has a disease which has been arrested. Most persons eventually lose the desire to drink and are not tempted if they accompany friends to bars or serve liquor to guests in their homes. But there are always a few who are constantly in danger. And I am one of those unfortunate few. I am continually tempted, so I shun parties where liquor is served. I cannot look at it, smell it, even think about it. It sets that inner, involuntary compulsion astir. If I were to slip now I feel certain I could not fight this battle over again. Drink to me means death.

Persons who seek help know that when they go to A.A. their problems will be unknown to anyone else, that anonymity will be rigidly adhered to. Inquiries are numerous. Many people requesting addresses of groups within their reach are surprised to find sanctuary almost around the corner. A quick reply directs them. Many isolated persons, aware of an imminent fall, or having already slipped, hastily establish touch by long-distance telephone or telegraph.

Six years ago, when A.A. was comparatively small, grants were offered by Mr. John D. Rocke-

feller, Jr., and some of his friend? and accepted by the Alcoholic Foundation, parent organization behind A.A. These giants are no longer needed. With the rapid growth of A.A., sufficient funds have been contributed by the many groups to defray central office expenses. There are no dues, no charges for service. The New York clubhouse, where local visitors are received, contains, in addition to offices and the staff, an auditorium, kitchen and lunch room, game rooms, library and other essential appointments.

National headquarters has records which showed me that 50 percent of those who come to A.A. sincerely wanting to stop drinking recover immediately: another 25 percent have stopped after one or two slips; and of the remaining 25 percent, some fail entirely, a small percentage is lost sight of through lack of contact on the part of the individual, and others eventually return to stay dry. Two types cannot be helped by A.A.: Half-hearted persons who merely toy with the idea of becoming dehydrated; and those with brain lesions or psychoses.

The New York companionship strengthened my shield and I was given a keener insight into the importance of the spiritual angle. I was made to see that most failures result from lack of acceptance of some power greater than yourself. The odds apparently favor you as personality changes develop. I have found added encouragement not only from everyone in A.A. but from my friends.

Once one recovers a constructive approach toward life, self-confidence and a belief in the future, the devil of alcoholism can be conquered. I believe — and my friends assure me — I have done it. —*Dick B.*

**Mail Call** (Continued from Page 9)

intervening years when this phobia was not exhibited.

In the same way the alcoholic's escape from the unwelcome realities of life—and especially those realities which are neurotically aggravated because of babyhood incidents—is frequently suggested by the subconscious mind, in this case "The Greater Power." If the subliminal consciousness can cause us to do things which we know are going to be disastrous, then evidently the subconscious is a greater power than ourselves, i.e., than our conscious minds. It is therefore entirely logical to suppose that an appeal to this power might well cause favorable results, coupled with the following psychological program, such as A.A. The daily prayer, the auto-suggestion, the 24-hour program, quite possibly could nullify or neutralize the unfavorable impressions formed in childhood.

While this theory would be primarily for the so-called non-believer, it is obvious that it might receive serious consideration from anyone who does not like to take his opinions ready-made.—S.S.

## Lost Weekend

(Continued from Page. 2)

and director, should not only make us thankful, but should make us pause and think. Outsiders *can* understand us, after all. These film-makers have, and their work may force some understanding of us and the nature of our problem into the minds of countless movie-goers, among them alcoholics who do not yet grasp the implications of their own behavior.

This last is why the one flaw in the picture, from our point of view, is such a terrible pity. The ending falls down badly. It would convince no one, I think, not even a completely non-understanding non-alcoholic. It implies that Don Birnam will escape his obsession by writing a book about it. An alcoholic, recovered or active, or anybody who has had any dealings whatever with an alcoholic, will know all too well that it is never so simple as that. But the public may conceivably accept the over-simplification, and regard the recovery of an alcoholic as a matter purely of his own volition coupled with an "aim in life". They may do this because many people already think this, and not because the picture builds up to such a conclusion. It doesn't. In fact, it has prepared such a powerful and overwhelming argument as to the obsessional nature of alcoholism and its devastating effect on an otherwise charming and lovable character with great potentialities as a person, that a very short time after seeing the feeble ending, one has forgotten it and remembers only the mounting horror of Birium's ride on the merry-go-round of a binge.

Seeing this picture, for an A.A., is at best a therapeutic experience, reminding us forcibly from whence we have come, stirring us to more fervent gratitude for our escape, moving us to urgent application of our 12th Step. How many there still are who need our help and do not even know it! At worst, the movie will provide a shattering recapitulation of past agonies—in itself a sobering experience. And even for those who know and understand nothing of our inside view, the film *The Lost Weekend* will prove to be an intense, dramatic, and finely wrought story, with characters in whom they can believe (particularly Nat the bartender) and a pictorial presentation that is frequently terrifying in its realism. According to *Variety*, noted for the accuracy of its forecasts, "It is smash box-office".—*Marty M.*

\* \* \*

MINDS ARE LIKE PARACHUTES—  
THEY WON'T WORK  
UNLESS OPEN

# A.A. 's Country-Wide News Circuit

In Birmingham, Ala., the *first regional* A.A. convention ever held in the South went over the top with hundreds of members attending from Virginia, West Virginia, North and South Carolina, Louisiana, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama. The following day the A.A.s assisted at the first meeting of the Alabama Committee on Education with Respect to Alcoholism, created through an act of the last legislature.. On their *second anniversary* the Flint Group was host to the second out-state A.A. get-together in Michigan. The Wolverines came from Jackson, Bay City, Mt. Morris, Traverse City, Royal Oak, Saginaw, Howell, Pontiac, Pleasant Ridge, Kalamazoo, Richland, McFarlan and Ortonville; Ohioans came from Canton, Dover and Lakewood. A surgeon from Ohio, with five university degrees to his credit, related his story with booze, which newsmen declared was as "poignant as a Somerset Maugham novel."... The *three-year old* St. Joseph, Mo., Group has bought a clubhouse at 522 South Twelfth Street, phone 4-3809.

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Fort Wayne, Ind., A. A. s observed their *third anniversary* with a dinner; among the 75 men and women present were guests representing the clergy, hospitals, medical profession and press. Dick S., formerly of the Cleveland Group and now of Chicago, was one of the speakers... The Ottumwa, Iowa, A.A.s observed their *first anniversary* with a large open meeting and banquet... A member of the Wilmington, Del., Group recently spoke on A. A. during a broadcast by the American Legion Auxiliary... The Albany, N. Y. Group entertained at a dinner several up-state groups... A story of his flight from alcoholism, in which he mentioned that he'd been jailed in 38 states, was told by an A.A. of Springfield, Mass., before the Springfield Exchange Club... The newly-formed Lynn, Mass., Group reports rapid growth, with members from Lynnfield, Salem, Peabody, Marblehead, Gloucester, Wenham, Saugus, Beverly, Danvers and Nahant often coming to the meetings; among the guests are clergymen, doctors, police, probation officers, personnel managers and others engaged in public service... Two A.A.s of the Waterbury, Conn., Group addressed the Beth-El Men's Club in the Synagogue, presided over by Rabbi William P. Greenfeld.

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A. A.s of Ann Arbor, Mich., in an open letter to one of the local papers, pointed out some behind-the-scenes facts which alcoholics and non-alcoholics alike invariably ask. Their letter gave the following information: The Central Office of Alcoholics Anonymous is located in New York

City. The mailing address is The Alcoholic Foundation, P. O. Box 459, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, N. Y.

The Central Office is maintained by the trustees

## A.A. DIGEST

*Excerpts from Group Publication\**

*Hy and Dri*, Minneapolis Minn.: "Seems we're falling down on sponsorship somewhere along the line... Sponsors, ask yourself this question: "Did I get all the A. A. I needed from the four instruction classes, or were the Tuesday night meetings a help, too?" If you answer it truthfully you'll find we all have a lot to learn about A.A."

*The Eye-Opener*, Los Angeles, Calif.: "Long before the atomic bomb came into being, A. A. had earned the right to be known as The Great Exploder. It began by exploding a lot of firmly established theories about alcohol and the people who consumed it; and it has now exploded the antiquated belief that women just can't get along together. We have a women's group of which we're justly proud."

*Central Bulletin*, Cleveland, Ohio: "A great and learned saint (Thomas Aquinas) said that the Supreme Power does three things for us. First, He corrects us; next, He instructs us; and finally, He takes us unto Himself. Our first contact with A.A. is the stage of correction, and at this stage it usually is true that the only help a man recognizes is the help of these other alcoholics. Instruction follows quickly, and here we learn that older members of the group have turned their hearts and minds to the higher Source of help... The individual can do as he chooses, but he observes that those who have made the most progress... are those who have placed themselves in the hands of the Supreme Power."

*Camel Club Chronicle*, Marshalltown, Iowa: "Marshalltown was well represented both at the banquet and Marty's talk and also at the Saturday meeting. We want to congratulate the D. M. Group on doing such a swell job."

*A. A. Tribune*, Des Moines, Iowa: "B. P. at the helm last night and what a meeting! Great going, 15. and the hat does \$93 after N.'s talk with tears in his eyes about how broke we are after buying that brand new restaurant stove. To hear N. you'd think we were just about ready to move into the poorhouse. The stove is a beauty and I noticed something last night with that stove, imagine us two years ago, getting a thrill out of a new stove and last night there were guys out there feeling it, looking it over, smiling and just like a guy is with a new toy."

of the Alcoholic Foundation as A. A.'s national headquarters. The trustees are nine (previously seven) in number: five are interested professional and businessmen, and four are members of A. A. As trustees, none receives compensation for his services. The Central Office writes replies to hundreds of inquiries monthly, sends out A. A. literature and interviews many people who call in person. Besides supervising this correspondence center, the trustees have charge of national publicity and consult with the A. A. groups on matters of policy. They are, in effect, A. A.'s National Service Committee.

The Central Office is supported by voluntary contributions from the groups and from the income of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, which, through Works Publishing, Inc., is wholly owned by the Alcoholic Foundation.

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Inspired by the NCEA and A. A., establishment of a clinic for alcoholics in Erie County, N. Y., is now assured. The Council of Social Agencies in Buffalo has approved a plan to create the clinic, as recommended to it by a sub-committee including A. A.s from Erie County, and other social agencies; the sub-committee recommended an annual budget of \$25,000.

» » \*

An all A. A. orchestra and several A. A. vocal soloists were among the special attractions at the 11th anniversary banquet of the A. A. at the Hotel Commodore, New York, Nov. 7. The orchestra played all during the dinner hour. It is an outgrowth of New Jersey groups. The musicians get together and practice after meetings.

\* \* \*

A group was recently formed in Greenville, S. C., at a meeting attended by A.A.s from Asheville, Hendersonville, Shelby, Charlotte, Atlanta and Rock Hill... The Toledo, Ohio, Group — which advertises regularly in the *Toledo Times*: "Alcoholics Anonymous, 241 ½ Superior Street; 8:30 p. m." — celebrated its *fifth anniversary* with a dinner and dancing; present were many from various sections of the state. Toledo now has over 300 members... A drunk in Knoxville, Tenn., who hasn't yet encountered the A. A. group flourishing there, after repeatedly facing drunkenness charges, pulled another surprise when he asked Acting City Judge H. O. Pollard to "send me to the workhouse to straighten up." The judge asked "How much time do you want?" The defendant replied "Oh, about 10 days." He was given the sentence.

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"Alcoholics Anonymous—2979" is a new number in the Bristol, Va., phone book; the Bristol Group got under way only a short while ago.

## No Double Standard

(Continued from Page 8)

In that short hour something was lifted from my heart, never to return. Three psychiatrists had failed to do it over a long period of years.

"You are sick," Marty and Helen said. "You are sick, not wicked. See, it is a pattern. You have followed this pattern. We, too, behaved in just this way. It is a pattern and you are not alone. You are not the only woman who has been like this. Thousands and thousand? of men and women have been like this. And now they are sober. See, it is an illness, a disease with symptoms that we all have. Not a private sin that you alone have invented."

And so this is the end of my story and the beginning of it.

For years I thought I was the only one. The only "nice" woman who behaved this way. The worse I felt, the worse I got. One doctor said to me: "Remorse has contained within it the intention to do it again." This was a brilliant and wise saying. But I could not quit being remorseful. I could not stop doing it again, getting drunk again and again. It's a progressive disease. But I didn't know that. I just thought I was becoming a worse and worse person. I avoided my "respectable" friends more and more. My "unrespectable" friends, with whom I had cast my lot (in order to drink all I wanted to in company)—even these friends criticized me more and more. They, who had thought at first that I was such fun, now avoided me. They told me not to come around when I was drinking. And I was always drinking.

I, who, like most neurotics, had a high white ideal, an unattainable ideal of the person I

should be, now found myself unwanted everywhere. I, who had meant to be the wittiest, the prettiest, the most desirable of women. The woman whom everybody would be just crazy to have around. (You note here that I wanted to be liked and loved, but didn't want to like or love anybody in return.)

I was now reduced to going to a cheap bar for my social life, I happen to have a small income. I never cadged drinks from strangers because I didn't have to. I never was robbed, assaulted, beaten up. But I might have been. The difference between the "protected" woman alcoholic (even the woman who drinks secretly in her room and never goes out) and the panhandler on the Bowery is economic. Are you shocked? But this is so. A drunk, man or woman, will do anything to get a drink. Anything—eventually. Perhaps the men, more than the women, know that this is true.

I didn't hit the gutter economically, but in spirit I was there. I spent every night in that cheap bar. I was able to drink there "safely" but I was despised by everyone.

Lots of people think that anything goes in a ginmill, that you can get as drunk as you like and behave any way you like. Not so. Women, especially, are expected to behave. A lady lush creates disturbances. Men are bound to want to, pick her up. If she doesn't want to be annoyed, as the saying goes, the bartender has to protect her. If, on the other hand, she encourages advances from men, there may be trouble with the police.

The little bar I frequented was what is known as a family bar. There was a little group that dropped in regularly. They were as gossipy and moralistic as a country club set. They were not alcoholics.

So I, who planned to be the most beautiful, witty, charming and sought-after woman in all New York, was spending my evenings annoying the customers in a ginmill. The customers moved their barstools when they saw me coming.

But this place was my last refuge. Here was the last spot on earth to search for "It." The joy of living. Fulfillment. I called it pleasure. I went there every night looking for pleasure, the pink balloon. Something sick and hungry in me set up an inquiry for this elusive thing. "I will drink, and It will come," I said. "This thing I have never had. and never found anywhere in all my life. A few drinks, and I'll get it." But during the disappointment of those first drinks, I knew I didn't have It. This was a boring ginmill. Sordid. What could I find here? And I would drink more to overcome this terrible emptiness. I did not know that the lack was in myself. That joy, fulfillment, pleasure and love were chronically absent from me; that all the pleasure I had from my drinking was anticipatory.

I was so sick mentally, now, that I was afraid to drink alone. I was going toward my death, and somehow I knew this. I stayed in that bar till it closed.

"Remorse has contained within It the intention to do it again."

Yes. Every morning (or afternoon) I'd swear never to do It again. I must stop, I'd say. I must taper off. I must swear off. It was not only the hangovers that bothered me, I did not have the ordinary remorse of someone who has merely gotten drunk. It was as though I had some inner skin disease, something awful and sore, eating away at the fabric of myself. And then, at night, this fabric would reverse itself into the bright, joyful excitement, the anticipation. I would think, I'm going to the bar tonight. I'm going to get drunk. Not too drunk. Just enough.

This is a common experience. In A.A. you hear this story told over and over. But I know how all the women in the world feel who have had, and are having this grief and misery; and shame and guilt. More and more women are coming into A.A. But there are still countless women who are afraid to come. They are afraid to admit they need help. Sometimes they won't admit It to themselves. They have applied the double standard to themselves. They think that they are worse than men.

And they do not know that they are just sick people who need help. A woman who has TB doesn't think she is worse than a man who has TB. It's the same thing.

Many people all over this country, indeed all over the world, still think the same way. They think all drunks are a disgrace. They think women are doubly disgraceful. But now, at last, through the press, through the more widespread knowledge of A.A. and of alcoholism generally, these old witcheries and taboos are breaking down.

More and more people are understanding that alcoholism is a disease; that the alcoholic, whether man or woman, can be helped and is worth helping.

And as for me, who felt so terrible, I now feel wonderful. I am getting well as a person. I, who did not believe in anything except myself, and who cared for no one but myself—I think that, a Higher Power must have sent my psychiatrist to hear Bill talk just at that time. It was around the time that my last chance was at hand. I was very near death. And I, who was going to get Bill to take a drink, I have learned what the word humility means. I have learned what the words love and understanding mean. I have a long way to go, but A.A. is like that. You keep going. You never stop. A.A. is a constant restatement of a few simple things that we must all have if we are to keep sober, to be happy or to live at all.—*Felicia G., Manhattan*

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