

September 1948

WHEN and where and how did Alcoholics Anonymous begin? When and how was the Alcoholics Foundation begun? These And many other questions are asked daily by members of A.A.

To date no complete and accurate history of the movement has been written. In the early days the pioneer members kept no written account of their activities so that anything written now is based almost entirely upon the memories of these men.

In the earliest beginning the story of Alcoholics Anonymous is the story of two men, Bill W. of New York and Dr. Bob of Akron, Ohio. This story of their personal struggles for sobriety is known to most.

After a long and disastrous alcoholic history, both Bill W. and Dr. Bob were introduced to the Oxford Group.

Dr. Bob became interested in 1933 upon his release from a sanitarium. Prior to his meeting with Bill in 1935 he made every attempt to obtain sobriety but seemed unsuccessful in spite of his efforts.

Bill's first contact with the Oxford Group came during the winter of 1934 when a childhood friend, also an alcoholic, came to his home—sober.

This friend impressed upon Bill the thought that he could remain sober only if he helped someone else. This Bill tried but after six discouraging months he had not dried up one drunk—except himself!

HOW DID

With his new sobriety came a business venture which brought him to Akron, Ohio. The business venture failed and he was again faced with the comforting thought that he could be a success, for a brief time, with a bottle of gin. It was at this low point that he prayed—and promptly set out to find another alcoholic.

He contacted an Akron minister who gave him a list of members of the Oxford Group and by sheer accident he called a family who knew an alcoholic who was in need of help. A meeting for the two was arranged for the next day. So it was that on Mother's Day, 1935 Bill W. met Dr. Bob.

The message Bill brought was a simple one. "Faith without works is dead. Show me your faith, by my works I will show you mine." With the exception of one short binge Dr. Bob has never had another drink.

In order to maintain his own sobriety, Dr. Bob, had to find someone to help. With Bill W. he went to an Akron hospital and found Bill D. who has never had another drink since that time.

By the Summer of 1936 a group of five men were holding morning meet-

AA BEGIN?

ings in the kitchen of one of the members.

Bill had remained in Akron until October, 1935 when he returned to New York and began working night and day to help other alcoholics recover.

In the early beginnings these recovered alcoholics were in close association with the Oxford Group but by 1937 all relations between them had ended. This was the beginning of the new and independent group working only for the recovery of alcoholics, which was to become Alcoholics Anonymous as we now know it.

In December 1937 Bill W. arranged an appointment with Mr. W. S. Richardson. He told his story to Mr. Richardson and was evidently so sincere and convincing that Mr. Richardson called on three of his friends for consultation. A dinner meeting was arranged and Bill again told the story to the three friends, Mr. Albert Scott, Mr. A. Leroy Chipman and Mr. Frank B. Amos.

Present at this meeting were two other non-alcoholics, Dr. W. D. Silkworth and Dr. L. V. Strong and six alcoholics from the New York area and Akron, Ohio.

Following this meeting plans for the beginning of the movement were very cautiously and carefully weighed. Emphasis was placed on the desires of the founders to keep this movement entirely apart from any religious organization or cult. Stress was laid on the fact that the movement which was to become Alcoholics Anonymous had no connection whatever with any religious denomination, the Oxford Group or any other group or movement of this character.

It was thought that perhaps a hospital or rest home near Akron would be advisable and it was with this thought in mind that Mr. Amos was asked to visit Akron and make a careful survey of the situation there.

The result of this survey by Mr. Amos caused him to report that the work being done in Akron was short of miraculous and that continued and deserved financial support should be given. As a result of this a contribution was received which would keep the work going in Akron until May 1, 1939.

This contribution only took care of the minimum needs of the Akron work and it daily became clear that the situation in Metropolitan New York also required support.

Such financial help as had been given thus far had been from the meager funds of other alcoholics. Plans were made during the Spring of 1938 to start a campaign among people who it was believed would be interested in this movement. It was

also decided at this time to publish a book which would serve as a text book for those seeking rehabilitation through the spiritual approach.

With these plans in mind and with the long range view of carrying on whatever was wise and necessary to promote this cause, it was decided to form an un-incorporated, non-profit, charitable organization under the laws of the State of New York. This organization would have general supervision of the work, and could

accept such contributions as might be made.

Upon advice of attorneys and after considerable and thorough consultation with alcoholics and the interested non-alcoholics, it was decided to form what is known as a Trust. The legal forms were drawn up and on August 11, 1938, the first meeting of The Alcoholic Foundation was held.

(Editor's Note: Other brief chapters on the evolution of A.A. will appear in subsequent issues.)