



THE ANTIDOTE FOR FEAR PRUDENCE, TRUST AND FAITH

Each year during the season of giving thanks we try to bring you a few new and meaningful words on an old but ever-deepening subject: the Twelve Traditions of AA. We heard none better in the past year than Bill W.'s closing words to the General Service Conference, and we saved them for this, our Traditions Issue.

THIS Conference opened on the keynotes of prudence, trust and faith, and its proceedings have been characterized by these attitudes and practices throughout. Confidence has therefore abounded among us and in this year's session we have gone nearly scot-free of any worry or fear. Indeed we have gone along so quietly that we have rather missed the usual excitements of hot debate and "viewing with alarm for the good of the movement."

But there has been an excitement nevertheless; a healthier excitement of quite another quality and kind. For instance: I found a most satisfying excitement as I watched the real eagerness, discipline and dedication with which this assembly has waded for days through a great pile of humdrum but very necessary routine work. It made me most happy when I heard you delegates pay repeated and grateful tributes to the folks back home—to those hundreds of committeemen and thousands of General Service Representatives whose combined labor had been, and always must be, the final foundation on which our whole world service structure and effort can securely rest. AA service leader-

ship, you said, was not for delegates and trustees alone; it had to be out there in the grass roots—and it already was there.

Then, too, we have all been gladdened by reports from nearly every quarter of our fellowship to the effect that confidence and real trust in our world services and servants has been much on the increase; that the fears of other days have almost evaporated. These are some of the newer and healthier excitements that we have felt in this notable conference of 1959.

Fresh in memory is that great big laugh we had when one of you delegates, addressing me, rose and said, "Bill, we all heard you give that convincing pitch on trust and faith the night we got here. Now what would you say if I told you that out in our country we have a member who was supposed to be acting as our treasurer for a pretty large and important meeting; that the minute the tickets were sold and the money was banked, he developed a terrific thirst, drew out all that dough, and took off on a traveling wingding that blazed a cross-country trail a thousand miles long?" We all remember how our fellow delegates grinned as he spoke

and how we roared with mirth as he finished.

Now there was a time, years back, when such a thirsty and abscending treasurer could have shattered our confidence wholesale. How well I remember the first one! I can remember, too, my own shock and chagrin when one of my best friends attacked me unmercifully because he didn't like the way I was acting. I remember those first breaks of anonymity at the top public level and all of the fear and violent controversy that followed in their wake. Such were the alarms of AA's early time. We feared we couldn't stay sober, we feared our group couldn't survive, we really feared that AA might collapse completely.

But how times have changed! What was once a big fear is today a big laugh—take that one about the erring treasurer. In it I think we can find some wonderful things. Let it be recalled that in that laugh there wasn't a trace of contempt or anger. There wasn't the slightest thought of punishment and I'll wager that not one soul here would have thought to call him a thief. Underneath that laugh there was sympathetic understanding, there was the realization that any one of us was still capable of an equal folly. Because we understood so well, we could forgive lightly and easily. Of course, we were laughing at the startled and penniless convention as it heard the bad news. But I think our laugh had a far

deeper meaning than this.

In reality I'm sure we were laughing at ourselves, at our old and far fetched fears. We were rejoicing because they had gone. Gone was the awful fear of what an individual's failure or behavior might do to us all, gone was the long time fear that the pressures and conflicts of the world around us might one day infiltrate and crush AA. We laughed, I think, because we had no bondage to fear and felt free. We had ceased to doubt our collective safety and security.

This brings me to another thought, another reason for reassurance. Of most nations and societies it seems true that their collective behavior has often been far worse than the individual behavior of their memberships. For example, few individuals in the world of today are hankering for war. Yet many nations crave conquest and armed conflict. Nations notable for the individual honesty of their citizens will keep phony books, inflate their currencies, load their people with debts that can't be paid and engage in all sorts of fraudulent propaganda and practices. Even the great religions, as organizations, have, quite contrary to their own teachings, sometimes gone in for a degree of violence and bigotry which the majority of their adherents would never have dreamed of imitating in their own personal lives. Mobs do all sorts of things that most of the individuals com-

posing them would seldom do separately and on their own.

While it's not for us to take a moral inventory of the world in any sense of pride or superiority, I do think it fair and timely to point out we AAs have thus far demonstrated a collective behavior probably much superior to our individual conduct. The whole, in our case, seems to be rather better than the sum of its individual parts. We are pretty much a bunch of power drivers. Yet AA, as a whole, has never quarreled with anybody. We like money for ourselves but we keep our fellowship treasuries poor. We like prestige, yet we somehow remain anonymous. As individuals we are apt to be aggressive, yet our society as a whole is quite non-aggressive, minding its own business.

In short, we are in a strange con-

trast to the world about us, and we devoutly hope we shall stay that way. In these perilous times this will be the sort of collective prudence that we shall constantly need. It will guarantee our effectiveness, safety and survival as nothing else can.

Our collective prudence respecting money, fame and controversy—derived of course from our Twelve Traditions—has continued to make AA new hosts of friends, and, just as importantly, no enemies. May this benign process never stop, within and without our fellowship.

As this wonderful Conference has so well shown, the absence of fear has made way for wisdom and prudence; prudence has led us to confidence and trust and faith—faith in our fellow man, faith in ourselves, and faith in God's love.