

The opening address of Mr. Bernard B. Smith, non-alcoholic Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation, at the Fourth Annual General Service Conference of AA, held April 21-25, 1954, is here reproduced in full.

The Lost Commandment The Dictionary and AA

by Bernard B. Smith

As the time of this fourth and last of the experimental General Service Conferences approached, I found myself thinking of many things—of those exciting early struggling days when AA was taking form; of the many friendships that AA has made possible for me; of the countless heart-warming experiences that have been mine within the fellowship of AA; of the wonder that in so short a time AA could have produced a General Service Conference with every section of the United States and Canada represented by its chosen delegate.

Perhaps, more than anything else, I thought of the miracle in timing in AA—of the fact that things seem to get started in AA only when the time is ripe; of the vexations at things unaccountably delayed, and the later realization that they were delayed only because the time for doing them had not yet arrived. I thought of the apparent accident of the choice of Spring as the time for the holding of our

General Service Conferences—Spring, when the earth is reborn, and AA, by which we are reborn.

I thought then of the Finger of God determining our course; and the words "Finger of God" brought to mind the Ten Commandments written with the Finger of God, and I found myself reading the Divine Law as though for the first time, with the heart of AA and the brain of the law. And I thought then that, while all remember, even if all do not observe, all of the "shalt nots" in these divine Commandments, few remember the one or two "shalts" of the Ten Commandments. One great "shalt" is the Commandment, "Six days shalt thou labor, and the seventh day, rest." No one stops to think that the concept of the five-day week is, in effect, a unilateral abrogation of a divine Commandment now lost to mankind. The effect on civilization of the abrogation of this Commandment, and upon the ideals of society from which we once re-

coiled, is something I will want to talk about. But before I do so, I would like to discuss the Ten Commandments for what they are.

The "Ten Commandments" is a single instrument, not ten separate commandments. The instrument is entire; it is a Divine Law which is at the heart of most of the great religions of our time, Christianity, Islam and Judaism. These commandments are not set forth in separate places in the Bible, but in one place, as one instrument, as a basis for living, with each Commandment interdependent, rather than independent of the other. I hope you will bear with me as I discuss the subject of these Ten Commandments, for I believe the effect of the abrogation of this "shalt" Commandment has been completely disregarded.

Now it is a Cardinal principle of law that an instrument must be construed as a whole and intention determined from the entire instrument, and not from detached portions. Individual provisions must be considered in connection with all others. A clause which essentially requires something to be done to effect the general purpose of the instrument itself is, as a matter of law, entitled to greater consideration than any of the other clauses. The effect of the loss of this Commandment of affirmative action on all the negative "shalt not" Commandments in the Divine Law cannot, therefore, be overlooked.

When I was a boy in my teens, I lived on a farm. I worked six full days a week; I used to get up before

dawn, and in the darkness with one hand pull down the pump handle and with the other pour icy water over my face to waken me from my slumberous state. I was in the fields until dusk, and after dinner, within no more than a half hour, I found myself going to sleep out of sheer exhaustion. There was really no time, if the seventh day was spent at rest, to get into trouble. I had neither the time nor the energy to covet the farmer's daughter. In the period of life when the Ten Commandments were written by the Finger of God, men worked in the fields as I did when I was a boy, from dawn to dusk, and if the seventh day was spent at rest, the "shalt nots" or prohibitory Commandments were not difficult to follow, "Lead us not into temptation"—and "Six days shalt thou labor, and the seventh day, rest"—was one of God's ways of not leading us into temptation. But by society's unilateral abrogation of this divine Commandment, the "shalt nots" now become difficult to observe, and a society emerged so suffused with guilt that never again will psychiatrists be in want!

And so, with the 40-hour, 5-day week, we developed something that the Ten Commandments did not contemplate—a leisure-time society.

Until this century in this country, leisure existed for none but an infinitesimal few; for the rank and file of Americans worked in their separate ways as hard and as long as the sheepherders did thousands of years ago when the tablets of the Ten Com-



Bernard B. Smith addressing the Fourth General Service Conference

mandments were handed down. But in the last four decades, the American people have gradually become a leisure-class society. And so the reality with which we grew up was a new world—a world that had lost a great Commandment, a world where a leisure class had taken form—a world in which, as a consequence, the socially accepted ideals had rapidly become materialistic. We now had leisure to want—to covet a house like our neighbor's, his position, his prestige, his money—and these needs were introjected into the deepest recesses of our being, and the satisfaction of these needs became the measure of our conception of happiness.

I believe that our Twelve Steps were spiritually conceived to meet the challenge of this reality, the reality of the

development of a leisure-class society to whom the socially accepted ideals had become grossly materialistic. I like to think that our Twelve Steps—twelve "shoulds" and not "shalls"—are a bridge in the gaping gulf in the Divine law caused by the lost commandment.

Further evidence of the speed with which society, having surrendered this now lost commandment, adopted this new leisure-time-created materialistic credo, can be gleaned by reference to the dictionary.

I had occasion recently to refer to the current dictionary's definition of "happiness" in an address I made on the subject of Alcoholics Anonymous, in which I remarked that on the whole no group in modern society had attained so high a degree of relative

happiness as those who lived by the twelve tenets of AA. Because I prefer, if at all possible, to know what I am talking about, I looked up the definition of "happiness" in my Merriam-Webster New Unabridged Dictionary published in 1943.

To my surprise, the first definition there listed is "good luck, good fortune, prosperity." This materialistic definition is manifestly the antithesis of the kind of happiness that we in AA possess. The second definition listed in Merriam-Webster, however, I found directly applicable to the kind of happiness we in AA believe we can maintain through living by the philosophy of AA's Twelve Steps which brought us our sobriety.

This definition reads: "A state of well-being characterized by relative permanence, by dominantly agreeable emotion, ranging in value from mere content to positive felicity, and by a natural desire for its continuation." It was measured in terms of this definition that I stated that those who live by the principles of AA achieve a higher measure of happiness than any class or group of people to which I, as an individual, have ever been exposed.

After I made this address, I thought a good deal about this definition. I knew that the definitions contained in a dictionary follow current socially accepted usage, and I was disturbed by the fact that the first definition of happiness should be defined today as "good luck, good fortune, prosperity." So I examined a number of dictionaries

published in the 1890's, and I found that the word "prosperity" appeared in none of these dictionaries under the definition of "happiness." I then happened on a Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary, published in 1927. By this time the definition "good luck, good fortune, prosperity" not only appeared, but had reached second place in the dictionary; by 1943 it had reached first place, supplanting that definition of "happiness" by which we in AA prefer to be counted, and a totally materialistic conception of happiness now held undisputed sway over modern society.

So, sensitive human beings seeking to achieve this new, socially accepted, materialistic definition of happiness, finding this kind of social happiness unattainable, or, attaining it and finding it empty, fought against it unconsciously, draining it off in alcohol. The bottle became the symbol, not of a disordered mind, but of disordered, introjected, social ideals; and when finally, through AA, we discarded the bottle, we discarded with it the first definition of "happiness" as contained in our current dictionaries, and adopted the second. For in surrender we ended our insane efforts to achieve the unrealistic social and economic ideals of a leisure society that, following upon the lost commandment, mankind had established for itself.

Our Twelve Steps, therefore, judged by the socially accepted standards of happiness of this age, are steps backward—yes, back, back into the universal heart of man; back into the

spirit of man. I will believe that the world has moved forward when our dictionaries are revised backward.

Now, rumor has it that I am a non-alcoholic. Perhaps the best proof that I am a non-alcoholic is my utter failure in Twelfth Step work. The best I have ever been able to do is to lead my alcoholic friends into the arms of one of my AA friends. For the non-alcoholic cannot help the alcoholic; because an alcoholic, like any other human being, does not want people running into his home to do him good. The alcoholic who has ceased to drink, however, does not come to do good as a superior human being, but comes, rather, to his brother, to share the gift of sobriety. He in effect, directly or indirectly, indicates to his suffering brother that he calls on him to help him to help himself.

He comes not to reform, but to share—to share that which once someone shared with him; to break sobriety's loaf of bread with him, and if the loaf is truly shared, behold, the giver's loaf is restored and is greater than ever, and he with whom the loaf is shared now has a whole loaf to share with others. For when the AA shares, he has no sense of giving up anything. He believes in service, not sacrifice. He will falter as he takes the Twelfth Step if he feels that his service is a sacrifice. For when the joy goes out of sharing, we lose the power to share. For it is not sacrifice but service to others that provides us with the key to unlock our hearts.

So the AA comes to a suffering

brother gently; he asks for little; he does not demand that the alcoholic take all Twelve Steps at one time. All he asks is that he take the first step toward the light of sobriety. He does not ask a man to go dry; he only asks him to get his feet wet by standing at the spiritual wellspring of AA.

Recently I was flying over the deserts of our great southwest. Here and there, almost out of nowhere, were tiny patches of lush green growth, surrounded by great expanses of brown, lifeless desert. I thought of the great springs of water lying under this desert expanse which, if tapped, would cause the entire desert to flower; and I thought, God provides the water, but we have got to dig the wells. And these green, lush patches I likened to our groups, where, with the faith derived from our Twelve Steps, we dug the wells that caused a patch in the desert of life to flower. And I thought how we learned that we could not transform the desert in which we lived, alone; we could not dig that well alone.

For in AA the whole is truly greater than the sum of all of its parts. The infusing power of the group, of our fellowship, draws something more out of each of us than any of us by himself can supply, and each of us in turn draws out of the spiritual reservoir of our fellowship the added courage and will which makes each of us the stronger, and our fellowship the greater. So as each draws at the well of AA, the level of that well does not fall, but rises; and as each year more

and more draw at the spiritual well of AA, our well brimmeth over.

I thought then of our General Service Conference, which provides channels between the wells of each group so none can go dry; of our general services that shore up the channels and keep them in repair, and extend them as new AA oases are formed in the desert of life, and bring the tools when needed to dig new wells. There can be no dry holes in AA. For while one AA's well is full, no one else's need be dry.

For, in truth, we had lived blinded, and saw nothing about us but a world that was to us a dry choking desert, until the flame of faith opened our eyes. And then we saw—and the words are not mine but those of St. Augustine—"the universal gracefulness of the heavens, the earth, and the sea, the brightness of the light in the sun, moon, and stars, the shades of the woods, the colours and smell of flowers, the numbers of birds and their varied hues and songs."

Tonight, we convene the last of our trial General Service Conferences. In these next four days we must decide whether the Third Legacy is something we want to accept. We have had the use of it for three Conference years. We have become accustomed to it, we know what it is, and now, in keeping with the terms of the legacy, we must decide whether to retain it or return it; and if we decide to retain it, determine the conditions under which we will use it. I have been honored by you by being permitted to

serve as your Chairman in this decisive Conference. I should be less than forthright if I did not express my views, for I have thought long about our Conference. I believe that the General Service Conference is and must be a permanent part of the structure of Alcoholics Anonymous; and I say that not only because of what the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous means to us, but because of what the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous means to the future of human society. For our fellowship is an island of hope for the life of the spirit, a kind of fellowship to which in time man, beset by the materialism and commercialism of this electronic age, must one day turn to survive. The fellowship of AA is to me, and to all who have reflected upon it, the ideal to which society must aspire if it is not to perish. This ideal was magnificently expressed in a broadcast I heard when I was last in Britain.

The broadcaster talked about an ideal fellowship for society, a fellowship he regarded as beyond the hopes of present civilization, and yet one to which society must point if it is to survive. This definition of fellowship was substantially as follows: "The possession of a shared and integrated ideal; a loyalty which lifts each member of society out of his self-esteem and self-pity; a faith which satisfies and surpasses all our ordinary aspirations, and makes our life an adventure and a partnership."

I say to this meeting that this ideal of fellowship exists in, and is, Alco-

holics Anonymous. So we owe an obligation to society to insure that this ideal fellowship which we possess survives; that this flame of faith, this beacon light of hope for the world, ignited by the spirit lamps of your suffering and recovery, must never be extinguished. We may not need a General Service Conference to insure our own recovery. We do need it to insure the recovery of the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness one short block away from this room. We need it to insure the recovery of a child being born tonight destined to alcoholism. We need it to provide, in keeping with our Twelfth Step, a permanent haven for all alcoholics who, in the ages ahead, can find in AA that rebirth which brought us back to life. We need it because we, more than all others, are conscious of the devastating effect of the human urge for power and prestige which we must insure can never invade AA.

We need it to insure AA against government, while insulating it against

anarchy; we need it to protect AA against disintegration, while preventing over-integration. We need it so that Alcoholics Anonymous, and Alcoholics Anonymous alone, is the ultimate depository of its Twelve Steps, its Twelve Traditions, and all of its services. We need it to insure that changes within AA come only as a response to the needs and the wants of all of AA, and not of any few.

We need it to insure that the doors of the halls of AA never have locks on them so that all people for all time that have an alcoholic problem may enter these halls unasked, and feel welcome. We need it to insure that Alcoholics Anonymous never ask of anyone who needs us what his or her race is, what his or her creed is, what his or her economic or social position is. We need it because, in the words of Pope Pius XII, we believe—and I quote from him—"Every people and every race which has been formed on earth today has an equal right to say, 'Our Father, who art in Heaven'."

