

November 1964

## *The Serenity Prayer*

*God grant me the serenity to accept  
the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can,  
and wisdom to know the difference.*

THERE'S nothing new under the sun? Well, perhaps there is in the area of material things. Telstar and moon probes are new. As a matter of fact, so is AA, which celebrated a young twenty-ninth birthday this year. But in the spiritual life, when we make a discovery, we're usually waking up to an old truth.

When the Grapevine last reported on the origin of the Serenity Prayer (January, 1950, issue), we had traced it to Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, who set it down in 1932 in very much the form given above. AA first used it on printed cards and at meetings in 1939. Dr. Niebuhr said at the time that he thought it "might have been spooking around for years, even centuries...."

Now an alert AA has sent us a clipping from the Paris *Herald Tribune* of an article written by its special Koblenz (West Germany) correspondent: "In the rather dreary

hall of a converted hotel, overlooking the Rhine at Koblenz, framed by the flags of famous Prussian regiments rescued from the Tannenberg memorial, is a tablet inscribed with the following words: 'God give me the detachment to accept those things I cannot alter; the courage to alter those things which I can alter; and the wisdom to distinguish the ones from the others.' These words [are] by Friedrich Ottinger, an evangelical pietist of the eighteenth century—"

We don't have the original German of the Koblenz tablet. And we have somewhere a printed card stating that the prayer is a "soldier's prayer from the fourteenth century." So there may be more news on the origins of it to write about in the future. But let us not get carried away by antiquarian research; it is the *praying* that is going to help me, an alcoholic.

*Anon.*