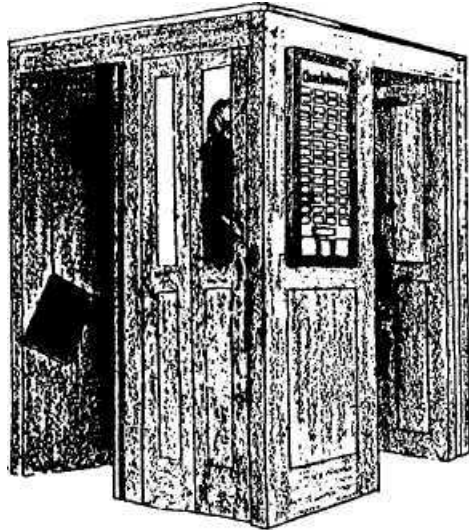


September 1953



A telephone booth in Akron, Ohio, 1935

"Thus we grow..."

I have before me two *Grapevines* containing three photographs. Two are on page 27 of the treasured Dr. Bob memorial edition issued January, 1951. They are of a church directory and a phone booth. The third photograph is from the June, 1953 issue and shows a meeting of the General Service Conference in progress. I was

filled with wonder as I looked at these pictures, at all that has transpired in the period of time (eighteen years) that is represented by them. I thought of that historic day when Bill made a worried scrutiny of the church directory, followed by anxious phone calls, seeking a drunk to whom to carry the message of hope, fighting

The Third General Service Conference of AA, 1953



desperately the consistent rebuffs . . . until finally a call met with a response that was destined to mean a new way of life to thousands who dwelt in darkness that day.

There is no tangible realization that eighteen years have passed since that vital scene was enacted. Yet these long years of testing and proving, offset by many a highlight and set-back, have blended into the essence of the present, rich in experience and understanding, the bulwark of those assembled at the General Service Conference. The past is required, for it is a true and tested guide to the future.

Frequently when two or more are in serious discussion of some of the principles concerning AA, the question is asked in some awe, "What will this movement lead to eventually?" There is, of course, no definite answer to such a question. But the possibilities of this movement devoted without reservation in service to fellow alcoholics, and to God, ever increasing in understanding, staggers the imagination.

The purpose of AA is to help the individual to gain and maintain sobriety, and to help other alcoholics to do the same. The movement has no other objective. He who seeks to use its principles for personal gain is destined to fall. Only honesty and sincerity mark its success. No hall of fame will ever be established for its members, for its deeds are performed quietly in secret, known only to God and to those who take part. Its promotion is prayer, that mystic force,

which penetrates all barriers and deals directly with God. To its ranks come the weak, the strong, the arrogant and the timid, cunning, bewildered, and deceitful, all tasting defeat from a common foe . . . alcohol. Made welcome and sheltered in true friendship and love, the brittle scars of a long and losing battle with life gradually fall away. Then true personalities emerge, and service to the suffering alcoholic, and to God, becomes the dominating impulse of life. Such is the purpose of AA.

Tradition Two states with the utmost clarity how the purpose of AA is expressed both by the individual and by groups. Many an older member who has nursed carefully a struggling group to a firm foothold, has found himself seemingly forgotten, sitting in the background. His once struggling babies have caught the vital message and taken over. Then comes the somewhat painful realization that it is not "his" group; he is but a trusted servant, not the authority.

The founders, early members, and trustees guided the movement from a flickering hope, to strong faith and firm conviction. Having established it beyond all doubt, it was presented to its members to be governed according to the Traditions as the Third Legacy. Thus authority will never rest with any individual or council, but in God as he expresses himself in the group conscience, and in the General Service Conference, whose delegates are trusted servants, serving

their regions and AA is a whole.

Often simplicity yields to complexity as the human mind grasps a great revelation, and places its own particular interpretation upon it. All too often the revelation becomes lost in the maze of human ideas, interpretations, and suggestions. Thus have great movements risen, flourished for a season, and died. But AA has steadily progressed through the labyrinth of complexity, carefully avoiding luring temptations of wealth, professionalism, and fame as a healer of one of mankind's most deadly diseases. Dr. Bob who responded to that original phone call, and heard and accepted the message from Bill, has left ringing in our ears, the vital admonition, "Keep it simple."

The turbulent dark alcoholic years with their fears and frustrations are past, and seem like a bad dream. The wondrous possibility of the AA way of life, and the steep climb to its acceptance and practice, are for many past, and from their present vantage point, perhaps it all seems remarkably

simple. Let no such complacency enter the mind, for it is very real to those yet in the darkness, and those seeing for the first time the faint light of hope. For them, into this twenty-four-hour day flows the past experience, of priceless value in service. Those who have accepted, and practice the program with confidence and poise derived from personal and group experience, are living this day the future of those yet to come.

The church directory and the phone booth of yesterday, live today in the Twelve Steps and Traditions, and constant calls carrying the message of AA. The first meeting of Bill and Dr. Bob lives on in meetings of thousands throughout the earth, ever to be confirmed in the Third Legacy . . . the General Service Conference. It seems to me that it is truly written in the Book of Ecclesiastes: "That which hath been is now, and that which is, hath already been; and God requireth that which is past."

Bob, Kimberley, B. C.

