

December 1950

YOUR THIRD LEGACY

by Dr. Bob and Bill

(NOTE: This is a proposal to form "The General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous" — a small body of State and Provincial AA Delegates meeting yearly, who could assume direct responsibility for the guidance of the AA General Service Headquarters at New York City — not to be confused with the 1950 Cleveland International Conference.)

WE, who are the older members of AA, bequeath to you who are younger, these three legacies — the "12 Steps of Recovery," the "12 Traditions" and now the "General Services of Alcoholics Anonymous." Two of these legacies have long been in your keeping. By the 12 Steps we have recovered from alcoholism; by the 12 Traditions we are achieving a fine unity.

Being someday perishable, Dr. Bob and I now wish to deliver to the members of AA their third legacy. Since 1938 we and our friends have been holding it in trust. This legacy is the General Headquarters Services of Alcoholics Anonymous—the Alcoholic Foundation, the A.A. Book, *The A.A. Grapevine* and the A.A. General Office. These are the principal Services

which have enabled our Society to function and to grow.

Acting on behalf of all, Dr. Bob and I ask that you—the members of AA—now assume guidance of these Services and guard them well. The future growth, indeed the very survival of Alcoholics Anonymous may one day depend on how prudently these Arms of Service are administered in years to come.

May we share with you a fragment of history? Twelve years ago, warmly aided by great friends, Dr. Bob and I established a Headquarters for our then obscure Fellowship. Soon thereafter we transferred this function to The Alcoholic Foundation, which was organized as a small Board of Trustees dedicated to serve our cause. It's Board was formed of alcoholics and non-alcoholic friends, who today number fifteen. When in the Spring of 1938 our Foundation was born, AA was but three years old. We had only 50 members. The book Alcoholics Anonymous was just an idea. None could then guess the magnificence of the gift which Providence had begun to bestow.

In the twelve years since, those 50 early members have spawned 120,000 more. AA stretches worldwide. Religion and medicine have approvingly raised us out of that No Man's Land where we once floundered between them. We have no enemies, our friends are beyond count. Like gleaming coral islands our thousands of Groups build them-

selves upward out of the alcohol sea. What a God-given miraculous circumstance!

Through our rather feverish infancy, the Alcoholic Foundation Board, unseen by many, quietly played a great part in the formation and spread of our well-loved Society. Acting through our General Office, the book Alcoholics Anonymous, and latterly the *Grapevine*, the Foundation became directly responsible for half our growth and effectiveness — both in quality and quantity. There can be no question of that.

Suppose then, all these years, we had been without those Services. Where would we be today minus the A.A. Book and our standard literature which now pours out of Headquarters at the rate of three tons a month? Suppose our public relations had been left to thoughtless chance? Suppose no one had been assigned to encourage good publicity and discourage the bad? Suppose no accurate information about AA had been available? Imagine our vital and delicate relations with medicine and religion left to pot luck. Then, too, where would thousands of AAs be today if the General Office hadn't answered their frantic letters and referred them to help? (Our New York Office received and answered 28,000 letters of all kinds last year.) Or in what shape would hundreds of distant AA Groups now be if that Office hadn't started them by mail

December 1950

or directed travelers to them? How could we have managed without a world Group Directory? What about those foreign Groups in 28 countries clamoring for translations, proved experience and encouragement? Would we be publishing the A.A. Book at Oslo, Norway and London, England? What of those lone members on high seas or in far corners of the earth, those prisoners, those asylum inmates, those veterans in service or in hospitals? Where might we one day be if we never had *The A.A. Grapevine*, our mirror of AA life and principal forum of written expression? Mow grateful we are for those Secretaries and those volunteer Editors and those friendly Trustees who have stood sentinel all these years over our principal affairs. Without all these things, where would we be? You must have guessed it. We'd be

nowhere; that's sure.

So it is that by the "Steps" we have recovered, by the "Traditions" we have unified, and by our Headquarters Services we have been able to function as a Society,

Yet some may still say — "Of course the Foundation should go on. Certainly we'll pay that small expense. But why can't we leave its conduct to Dr. Bob and Bill and their friends the Trustees? We always have. Why do they now bother us with such business? Let's keep AA simple." Good questions, these. But today the answers are quite different than they once were.

Let's face these facts:

First — Dr. Bob and Bill are perishable, they can't last forever.

Second — Their friends, the Trustees, are almost unknown to the AA movement.

Third — In future years our Trustees couldn't possibly function without direct guidance from AA itself. Somebody must advise them. Somebody, or something, must take the place of Dr. Bob and Bill.

Fourth — *Alcoholics Anonymous* is out of its infancy. Grown up, adult now, it has full right and the plain duty to take direct responsibility for its own Headquarters.

Fifth — Clearly then, unless the Foundation is firmly anchored, through State and Provincial representatives, to the movement it serves, a Headquarters breakdown will someday be inevitable. When its old-timers vanish, an isolated Foundation couldn't survive one grave mistake or serious controversy. Any storm could blow it down. Its revival wouldn't be simple. Possibly it could never be revived. Still isolated, there would be no means of doing that. Like a fine car without gasoline, it would be helpless.

Sixth — Another serious flaw: As a whole, the AA movement has never faced a grave crisis. But someday it will have to. Human affairs being what they are, we

can't expect to remain untouched by the hour of serious trouble. With direct support unavailable, with no reliable cross-section of AA opinion, how could our remote Trustees handle a hazardous emergency? This gaping "open end" in our present set-up could positively guarantee a debacle. Confidence in the Foundation would be lost. AAs would everywhere say: "By whose authority do the Trustees speak for us? And how do they know they are right?" With AA's Service life-lines jangled and severed, what then might happen to the "millions who don't know." Thousands would continue to suffer on or die because we had taken no forethought, because we had forgotten the virtue of Prudence. This should not come to pass.

That is why the Trustees, Dr. Bob and I now propose the "General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous." That is why we urgently need your direct help. Our principal Services must go on living. We think the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous can be the agency to make that certain.

(Your group secretary has a few copies of the full "Conference" plan of which the foregoing is only Section I. As the Foundation couldn't afford a full mailing to all AA members, additional copies may be had at the Foundation for a nickle each.)

Thanks,



CHRISTMAS GREETING 1950

from Doctor Bob and Bill

T*HIS is the fifteenth Christmas for Alcoholics Anonymous. Seldom has this tired world been more confused divided and distraught. Yet never has the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous been more alive, united and peaceable. God continues to bestow upon us — His long benighted ones — abiding joy and boundless freedom.*

What great gifts of Grace!

Do we listen, we can hear Him say "Freely ye have received, freely give - Merry Christmas to you all" We of AA shall take these words to heart as never before — For we, more than most are privileged to know their full meaning!