

APRIL 1952

*The first of a new series
of articles explaining
The Twelve Traditions. . .*

By

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EDITORIAL We were about to enter the church hall where our local group holds its meetings one night not long ago. Ahead of us on the walk that runs back to the door were casual groups of our fellow AAs, our comrades. Watching the little procession were two local citizens, and we heard one of them say: "Who, them? Why that's the town ex-drunks going to their town meeting!"

Now, come the 23rd of this April, 1952, there will be a somewhat similar scene as seventy-seven AA Delegates walk down a New York hotel corridor to attend the Second Annual General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous. "Who, them? Why that's U.S. and Canadian AAs going to an international town meeting."

You see, we like that term "town meeting," for the 1st Conference last year was that in spirit, in friendship, and in the joining of many voices to discuss the common good. It was the Third Legacy of AA in action ... and it was folks meeting in this fellowship with other folks from far places, and sitting together to give serious thought and counsel in guardianship of AA's traditions and world services.

This April of 1952, will bring last year's delegates back to sit with new delegates from the states and provinces not represented in the first panel. In future years AAs from beyond the oceans may well sit in this advisory assembly which is the "collective conscience" of AA and in which each delegate sits as servant, not as senator.

Between that first meeting of two who joined hands over an Akron kitchen table in an honest desire to stop drinking ...and the seventy seven from forty-eight states and beyond who will meet in the mature statesmanship of elected delegates . . . there now stretch seventeen eventful years.

Just as the first weekly home group "town meeting" existed to help eventually the individual alcoholic named "You," so now is the Second General Service Conference a town meeting for the unity and common welfare of us all ... and a hope for the millions who do not yet know ...

TRADITION ONE

*Our common welfare should come first; personal
recovery depends upon AA unity.*

The magnificent unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most cherished quality our society has. Our lives, the lives of all to come, depend squarely upon it. We stay whole, or AA dies. Without unity, the great heart of AA would cease to beat, our world arteries would no longer carry the life-giving grace of God, his gift to us would be spent aimlessly. Back again in their caves, alcoholics would reproach us and say, "What a great thing AA might have been!"

"Does this mean," some will anxiously ask, "that in AA the individual doesn't count for much? Is he to be dominated by his group and swallowed up in it?"

We may certainly answer this question with a loud "No!" We believe there isn't a fellowship on

earth which lavishes more devoted care upon its individual members; surely there is none which more jealously guards the individual's right to think, talk, and act as he wishes. No AA can compel another to do anything; nobody can be punished or expelled. Our Twelve Steps to recovery are suggestions; the Twelve Traditions which guarantee AA's unity contain not a single "Don't." They repeatedly say "We ought ..." but never "You must!"

To many minds all this liberty for the individual spells sheer anarchy. Every newcomer, every friend who looks at AA for the first time is vastly puzzled. They see liberty verging on license, yet they recognize at once that AA has an irre-

sistible strength of purpose and action. "How," they ask, "can such a crowd of anarchists function at all? How can they possibly place their common welfare first? What, in Heaven's name, holds them together?"

Those who look well soon have the key to this strange paradox. The AA member has to conform to the principles of recovery. His life actually depends upon obedience to spiritual principles. If he deviates too far, the penalty is sure and swift; he sickens and dies. At first he goes along because he must, but later he discovers a way of life he really wants to live. Moreover, he finds he cannot keep this priceless gift unless he gives it away. Neither he nor anybody else can survive unless he carries the AA message. Realization dawns that he is but a small part of a great whole; that no personal sacrifice is too great for preservation of the fellowship. He learns that the clamor of desires and ambitions within him must be silenced whenever these could damage the group. The moment this Twelfth Step work forms a group, another discovery is made - that most individuals cannot recover unless there is a group. It becomes plain that the group must survive or the individual will not.

So at the outset, how best to live and work together as groups became the prime question. In the world about us we saw personalities

destroying whole peoples. The struggle for wealth, power, and prestige was tearing humanity apart as never before. If strong people were stalemated in the search for peace and harmony, what was to become of our erratic band of alcoholics? As we had once struggled and prayed for individual recovery, just so earnestly did we commence to quest for the principles through which AA itself might survive. On thousands of anvils of heartbreaking experience, the structure of our society was hammered out.

Countless times, in as many cities and hamlets, we re-enacted the story of Eddie Rickenbacker and his courageous company. Like us, they had suddenly found themselves saved from death, but still floating upon a perilous sea. How well *they* saw that their common welfare came first. None might become selfish of water or bread. Each needed to consider the others and in abiding faith they knew that they must find their real strength. And this they did find, in measure to transcend all the defects of their frail craft, every test of uncertainty, pain, fear, and despair, and even the death of one.

Thus has it been with AA. By faith and by works we have been able to build upon the lessons of an incredible experience. These live today in the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, which — God willing - shall sustain us in unity for so long as he may need us.