DR. BOB'S STORY

In the beginning there were Bill and Bob

R. Bob was born August 8, 1879, in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, a typical New England village of some 7000 souls. As the only son of parents prominent in civic and church activities, his early childhood was spent under strict parental guidance.

Signs of inner revolt came at an early age. In later years the doctor liked to tell his children, Sue and Robert, of how he was put to bed every evening at five o'clock. He would go quietly enough, a fact which might have led the modern child-psychology-wise parent to suspect the worst, but which seemingly went unnoticed by the young man's parents.

As soon as he was reasonably sure that he was considered safely asleep he would arise, dress and slip quietly downstairs and out the back door to join his village gang.

In the summers the family often spent some weeks in a cottage by the sea. Here Bob became an expert swimmer. He and his foster sister, Nancy, spent many hours building and sailing their own sailboats. It was here that he saved a young girl from drowning.

While the boy, Rob, was high-spirited, considered rebellious and wayward, he was also industrious and labored long and hard at anything he really wanted to do. He wanted, above all else, to become a medical doctor like his maternal grandfather.

When he was about nine years old he began to show signs of liking to work, especially out of doors. That summer he was at a neighbor's farm helping the men load hay. Perhaps he was resting, perhaps he was prowling around poking under bushes to see what he could see ... he saw a jug... he pulled the cork and sniffed. It was a new odor to this son of strict New England parents. If the stuff in the jug smelled so good, it should taste good too. He liked the taste. He liked the way it made him feel. A little boy; a jug of hooch; the first securely welded link in the chain.

By the time he reached his teens, Rob was spending parts of his summers working on a Vermont farm or juggling trays and lugging baggage as a bellhop in an Adirondack summer hotel. His winters were passed trying to avoid the necessity of having to attend high school in order to receive a diploma. During his high school days young Rob learned much of what there is to know about a billiard table. He was a good student in spite of himself and graduated from St. Johnsbury Academy in 1898.

It was at a party given at the Academy that Dr. Bob first met Anne. A student at Wellesley, she was spending a holiday with a college chum. It was a small, reserved girl whom the tall, rangy Rob met that night. With an agile mind to match his own, Anne had a cheerfulness, sweetness and calm that was to remain with her through the years.

Now he held a Dartmouth diploma, but the desire to become a medical doctor was still with him. His mother, who had never approved of this career for her son, hadn't altered her views. For the next two years he worked for a large scale company; then he went to Montreal where he labored at selling railway supplies, and heavy hardware. He left Montreal and went to Filene's store in Boston.

All through this period he was drinking as much as purse allowed, still without getting into any serious trouble. But he wasn't making any headway either. He still wanted to be a doctor. It was time he was about it. He quit his job at the store and that Fall entered the University of Michigan as a pre-medical student.

His first discovery in his search for the facts of life on the campus was that joining the boys for a brew seemed to make up the greater part of after-class recreation. From Dr. Bob's point of view it was the major extra-curricular activity. It had long been evident that whatever Rob did, he did well. He became a leader in the sport. He drank for the sheer fun of it and suffered little or no ill-effects. His years at Dartmouth were spent doing exactly what he wanted to do with little thought of the wishes or feelings of others—a state of mind which became more and more predominant as the years passed. Rob graduated in 1902 ... "summa cum laude" in the eyes of the drinking fraternity. The dean had a somewhat lower estimate.

After high school at St. Johnsbury Academy came four years of college at Dartmouth. At long last the rebellious young colt was free of his parents' restraining supervision. New experiences were to be explored and enjoyed without having to give an accounting.

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Again he was free of all restraint. Earnestly, he got down to the serious
business of drinking as much as he could and still make it to class in the morning. His famous capacity for beer followed him to the Michigan campus. He was elected to membership in the drinking fraternity. Once again he displayed the wonders of his “patent throat” before his gaping brothers.

He, who had boasted to his friends, “Never had a hangover in my life,” began to have the morning-after shakes. Many a morning Dr. Bob went to classes and, even though fully prepared, turned away at the door and went back to the fraternity house. So bad were his jitters that he feared he would cause a scene if he should be called on.

He went from bad to worse. No longer drinking for the fun of it, his life at Michigan became one long binge after another. In the Spring of his sophomore year, Dr. Bob made up his mind that he could not complete his course. He packed his grip and headed South. After a month spent on a large farm owned by a friend, the fog began to clear from his brain. As he began to think more clearly he realized that it was very foolish to quit school. He decided to return and continue his work.

The faculty had other ideas. After a long argument they allowed him to return and continue his work. The Judge made the long journey in a vain effort to get him straightened out.

After those long disastrous binges, when Dr. Bob was forced to face his father he had a deep feeling of guilt. His father always met the situation quietly, “Well, what did this one cost you?” he would ask. Oddly enough this feeling of guilt would come, not because he felt that he had hurt him in any way, but because his father seemed, somehow, to understand. It was this quiet, hopeless understanding that pained him.

He was drinking more and more hard liquor now, and coming up to his final exams he went on a particularly rough binge. When he went into the examinations his hand trembled so badly he could not hold a pencil. He was, of course, called before the faculty. Their decision was that if he wished to graduate he must come back for two more quarters, remaining absolutely dry. This he was able to do. The faculty considered his work so creditable, he was able to secure a much coveted internship in City Hospital in Akron, Ohio.

The first two years in Akron, as a young intern, were free of trouble. Hard work took the place of hard drinking simply because there wasn't time for both. At one time during his internship he ran the hospital pharmacy by himself. This, added to other duties, took him all over the hospital, running up and down the stairs because the elevators were too slow, running here, rushing there as if the devil were after him. All this frenzied activity never failed to bring about an explosive, “Now where is that cadaverous young Yankee!” from one of the older doctors who became particularly fond of him.

Though the two years as intern at City were hectic, Dr. Bob had time to learn much from the older men who were glad to share their knowledge with him. He began to perfect his own skills so that he might become a specialist, a surgeon. When his two years of internship were over he opened an office in The Second National Bank Building, in Akron. This was in 1912. His offices were in the same building until he retired from practice in 1948.

He was completely out on his own now, and again free to do as he chose—some money in his pocket and all the time in the world. It may have been that reaction set in from one of the older doctors who chose—some money in his pocket and all the time in the world. It may have been that reaction set in from one of the older doctors who became particularly fond of him.

"He stayed around about two months more..."
Habits are like cork or lead—they tend to keep you up or hold you down.