

May 1953

Our "semi-official" 18th birthday report

HOW MANY AAs?

IF the first million is the hardest, Alcoholics Anonymous has done one-eighth of the job . . . worldwide membership in our Society has passed the eighth-of-a-million mark, according to the new 1953 AA World Group Directory: 128,361 strong, to be exact.

Exact membership statistics in AA, however, are not and never will be available, since protection of individual members' anonymity guarantees that general membership rolls will not be kept. The latest count of total members in 58 countries around the globe is based on reports from 5,243 groups and 127 "loners." And, as all observant group members know, the active membership of a group may vary at any given moment, sometimes

according to the interpretation of "when is a member?" In addition, many groups fail to report new membership figures from year to year.

Another variable which follows an unpredictable pattern is the precise method of "counting noses" used by the various groups. Some suggest that those who attend and take part regularly in meetings declare themselves members (or not, as the case may be) of that group; others may count everyone who has been dry and shows up fairly regularly for at least three months; still others base the count on a rough division of the average financial collection; some count only those who come out in bad weather, never turn down a Twelfth Step call, and are always willing with the broom or

dish-pan! There may even be some, it has been unauthoritatively suggested, that count the cigarette butts after a meeting . . .

Since General Service Headquarters never issues instructions, rules and regulations or anything else that might suggest an AA "government," the compilers of AA's annual census rely, by and large on the faithful reporting by each group secretary of what appears to be the more or less stable core of membership in the group. In New York a staff of four toiled for three months, processing the thousands of information cards, and the countless letters received from the groups who preferred supplying the desired information in that form, to produce the new Directory.

The 1953 total membership figure represents an increase of 13,637 individual members over 1952, or about 12 per cent. The total number of groups increased from 4,205 to 5,243 or roughly 24 per cent. At Directory press time there were 2,324 members in 98 hospital groups, an increase of 16 new groups in hospitals and rest camps; 9,304 members in 173 prison groups, an increase of 40 new prison groups; 15,675 members in 773 groups outside the United States, including 51 loners and 91 Internationalists (AA seamen). AA is now on the map in 17 places where it never was before, bringing the total number of countries with alcoholics recovering in AA to 58 (including the United States).

Some of these far-flung areas are at

present represented only by "loners," people in remote sections who are following the AA program "on their own," sustaining their sobriety through the AA Big Book and correspondence with each other and with their General Service Headquarters. Each loner is the nucleus of a potential new group.

The new AA World Directory indicates that membership growth of Alcoholics Anonymous appears to be leveling off and settling down to steady progress, reflecting the gradual spread of information and education about the disease of alcoholism which afflicts upwards of 4,000,000 individuals in the United States alone. The 1953 world "census" of AA completes an eighteen-year record:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Members</i>
1935	3
1936	15
1937	40
1938	65
1939	100
1940	500
1941	2,000
1942	6,000
1943	8,000
1944	10,000
1945	14,000
1946	29,000
1947	40,000
1948	60,000
1949	75,625
1950	96,475
1951	*120,000
1952	114,724
1953	128,361

• *Estimated.*