

February 1951



METROPOLIS

The super 25¢
tour of AA in
THE BIG CITY

Metropolis, they call it. Biggest city in the world. Melting pot... crossroads ... metropolis. Greek, that is. *Metro* for mother and *polis* for city. Mother city. It's greek all right to some of us who come here from Mason City or Kokomo, and it's Podunk and Yankee and Dixie to some of us who come here from Athens or Istanbul or even Dublin Town. But whatever you call this

metropolis it's big as hell, loud as hell, and if you're lonely... it just is hell.

You came to our Big Town to make a million or dream a dream or find the girl who left home from next door or just to forget something and then find you can't forget it because it got here before you did. There's the tallest building in the world, the most money

in the world, the longest bar, and the most olives, and biggest, blackest 8-ball known to man... and woman, too.

AA in the metropolis? Well sure tootin', oui monsieur, and begorra yes! All over the place. Five, count them (5) boroughs ... and up Westchester way ... part of neighbor Connecticut... and Long Island ... and groups of every kind and

shape and size — but just one flavor. Plain, ordinary AA flavor. One hundred and forty-four groups, an even dozen dozen, was the count the other night, and probably more by this morning. Things grow fast here, and even through the hard concrete and the solid stone this city's built on, these roots do go down and flourish mightily.

AA here? Why, sure, stranger. It's all around you, but probably you'll look first in the phone book there in Penn Station, Grand Central or the steamship pier. "Alcoholics Anonymous," in big black type just in case there is some dim new eye upon our shore. New York Intergroup, 114 Lexington Avenue... that's where your nickel rings, and if it's January 31st, you might be the 694th caller... with a good, solid voice answering just like you were the first to call.

New York Intergroup... nerve center of AA among these millions, Service Station # 1 for strange ones who get to Bagdad By The Subway and for natives who get strange living here in Sprawling Manhattan. Twenty-Eighth and Lex, nothing fancy, nothing Big Time. Just another corner where two streets meet and just another second floor office space. Walk up one flight and save a dollar, the pants store sign says around the corner, and here it's walk up one flight and maybe save a soul. An old loft building, one long sweeping room, with battered desks and telephones still smoking. Used to be a perfume factory, and the Intergroup staff folks say "it used to only smell here, now it often reeks" and they go on answering, the heaps of mail or saying a pretty small-town "howdy" to the new face at the door.

Here are the files, and the biggest "little black book" in town,

bulging full with phone numbers of Groups that are east side, and west side and all around the town. Here is the exchange of meeting times, the notices to pass on to the groups over yonder, and here is the first look at AA that many a John or Jane or guy or dame has ever had.

Swinging outside the window is a sign for the tailor shop downstairs ... "Same Day Cleaning." Up here it's same day, same night and stay-clean-or-fall-down-dirty, the faltering rags or robes that enter these Intergroup doors can always come back on any day.

Here is AA hard at work for the dozen dozen groups of the metropolis... Hilda and Eve and volunteers named Albert A. or maybe Betty B. And the phones funnel in the calls that say "my friend is sick" or "can someone help" or "send me something to read." You'd think those phone bells down here would learn that "easy does it"... but they keep on ringing.

But let's get out and have an AA look around this town ...

And where do we start on this rubberneck wagon around the metropolis, this sightseeing bus around Big Town's AA circuit? Well, there's a group right smack at Battery Park, and even further out to sea there's Staten Island if you want to make the rounds geographically. Or, by the alphabet, there's A for Alanon, the midtown club house in the Roaring Forties;

and there's Y for Young People, the 35-and-under AAs that meet in 10th Street's famous old Grace church. Z, that's a letter that's still open on our roster, but, if you'll pardon the pun, this area's brimming over with "ex" 's.

Old Timers would say to start this look-around at 24th Street, the Seaman's Group...and long ago the meeting place for Manhattan Group...and simply, in those days, The Club. Bill practically lived there then, and for a long while the old door with the funny address, 334½ West (a split number for drunks with split personalities, someone said) was the furthest outpost from Akron... it was AA completing the march to one sea. And New Timers might say our newest group is out there somewhere in the suburbs, where tonight there's one guy, and the book, and his groping thoughts to make a brand new quorum.

So let's just visit here and there. Melting pot, do they call metropolis? Well, in these towers of Babel, AA speaks a varied language, all right. Over in Brooklyn (that's a place, not a language, Bub) there's the Norwegian Group, but anyone who can say "skol" in any language can drop in. Up on 99th Street there's Hispano, and *aqui se habla AA, senior*. Way up on the east side there's Finnish-American and out in Farmingdale the meetings come to order in Russian, and we're told that the voltage of vod-

ka gets a thorough going over.

And there's something special out in Long Island's Great Neck. Folks from far lands, and strange, that work nearby at the United Nations...folks from countries that are friends and folks from countries that aren't friends, all sitting down together and mixing languages, and sharing faith in a world that sorely needs it ... and as sons and daughters of a Higher Power joining together in a benediction prayer that's older than any troubles Man has ever been able to cook up. And there are no vetoes on the personal AA victories of these UN people, and tolerance is more than just some glib speaker's word.

Busy city ... bustling city ... place to make a buck? Yes, and the butcher, the baker and even the candlestick maker are found on meeting nights around the town. In this perpendicular city where skyscrapers and subway caverns have given us ups and given us downs (as if we couldn't achieve those on a Nebraska prairie!) we have members from walks of life that range from tycoon to taxidermist, and from burlesque queen to badminton editor. There are even special groups to fit AA into working schedules. Take the Queens Night Workers Group in Ozone Park. Meetings at 3 p.m., with plenty of daylight inside, and plenty outside even on the shortest day of the year. And there's the Civil

Service Group, especially for servants of John Q. Public. Graphic Arts, for members of the printing trades who know the difference now between just plain pied type and pie-eyed type. And the Wall Streeters, who meet in Downtown Group at 6 p.m., after the Big Board's closed and cleaned up; and Construction Trades Group, where union cards are put aside in this union of journeymen who seek sober paydays.

And there are meetings low-bottom and meetings high-bottom, from Park Avenue's silk stocking lane to the Bowery's never-never land. There's East River Group, close to the shadow of "desire under the El" pillars .. where the dime that's handed out to weary new visitors for subway fare sometimes never gets as far as the turnstile ...but sooner or later is dropped back into the collection plate by a cleaner hand that has found a way and time for washing, and thinking, too. There's Twelfth Step House that, with a helping smile, can give a helping hand on a night's flop, maybe a job, and perhaps some non-skid clothing for a soul that made the long crawl over from Skid Row. And there's a midtown meeting in the plush-and-leather club room of a Croesus of a bank; and another in the station-wagon security of a neat parish house way up in old Suburbia, or whatever they call the town that the 5:15 takes you home to.

Hard city ... heartbreak-on-the-Hudson ...city of indifference? No, it's not quite that... so many of us know it isn't. For, while the clamor and the clutter and the clocks of New York whirl around, there are steady AA hands and AA hearts at work in places where there is no time ... and where even the stirring of a hope makes a quiet sort of noise. In Knickerbocker, in St. John's hospitals, there are AA beds and AA volunteers who disregard the clock... just to be on hand to touch the fevered brow, or hold the shaking arm with a clasp of friendship and to speak a gentle word of fellowship. And in the jail and prisons, from awesome Sing Sing to Riker's Island, there are little bands of people from "outside" with a message of encouragement and kinship . . . from deep inside. And at Rockland State, and Towns, and half a dozen hostels for the helpless, AA volunteers walk in who have taken time out from Times Square ... to lend a voice that may ring clear through someone's deep confusion.

Seven days and seven nights a week, somewhere in the Big City, AA is at work. Underneath the Harlem moon, or far across in Queens, a secretary lifts a gavel, and the hush falls that signals another meeting among the dozen dozen groups. Up in the Bronx, a borough for which a cocktail was named, a

word goes out "to the new man or woman who may be here tonight." Manhattan (did it have a cocktail, too?) stands noisily in its eternal wetness ... surrounded by two rivers and an ocean of some size ... but there are dry spots where voices in almost a dozen dozen dialects rise cheerfully over coffee, and the happy buzz of neighborliness seeps out over the city of strangers.

You say you're a stranger here, yourself? Well, there's an AA meeting somewhere in town for you tonight, and you're mighty welcome.

You'll know most of the people. There's Main Street, and Elm Center, and the Sunflower State written all over them. You'll know the meeting place, too. It's a room in a church, or a store, or a school, like as not, and if you'll just think back to last Tuesday night back home, well, you've been here before.

Glad to have you with us in metropolis. Let's get together while you're here. And say, let an old city slicker give you a tip about this Big Burg. Brother... *easy does it here!*



"ROUND THE TOWN"

Union Square