

May 1951--Toronto



IN 1813 Toronto was twice looted by U.S. troops. This is said in some quarters to have caused a resentment. A totally unknown historian has pointed out that, dating from this unneighborly incident, there was a marked increase in top-erish tipping in Toronto. Every one knows that drinking on top of an empty resentment leads almost inevitably to alcoholism. Thus Toronto has an 'excuse' straight out of the history books for turning out a distinguished array of anonyms. Few other cities can make that statement!

Today, however, all is forgiven. The slate is wiped clean. For if the Yanks really were responsible for Toronto's century-long binge, it was from those same Yanks that Toronto borrowed the solution to

its historic hangover. By now nearly a thousand Toronto alcoholics (some of whom are 7th and 8th generation descendants of those original 'loot toot' drinkers) feel that they have actually got the better of the bargain.

No one remembers what was lying around loose for those rude marauders of 1813 to carry off. But all are agreed that whatever it was it could not have been nearly so valuable as that which Torontonians brought back across the border 130 years later.

AA beginnings here were feeble, faltering and, for a time, futile. Early in 1941 Laurie C., a self-confessed member of this strange society who had got her basic training in New York, had moved back to her native Toronto. She was

followed very shortly thereafter by another Torontonian who had become overly fond of his dram. Gordon B. had made his peace with AA in Chicago then, a prodigal son, came home to pick up the pieces.

It says in the Big Book that 'wherever two are met in the name of sobriety there is an AA group.' So Toronto could, technically, claim ten years of existence. However, let us be somewhat conservative in this matter. Laurie and Gordon did yeoman service. The files of the General Service Office in New York testify to the fact that they 'carried the message' up and down the Don and Humber rivers and along the waterfront of Toronto Bay. But history isn't changed in a day. The seed sown on over-saturated ground seems simply to have fermented rather than to have germinated. At any rate, for the next couple of years AA in Toronto languished.

We have since come to learn to expect only the unexpected in AA. Logic, as so-called normal people usually look upon logic, is usually reversed in this society of ours. Certainly Toronto's start was a paradox. It was a non-alcoholic who had the persistence to keep at it until a few of us lifted our heads out of the rumpots for long enough not only to hear — but to heed! So, in 1943, Toronto AA could be said to be launched. Since then all of our troubles have

been 'little' ones!

We soon established quarters at 1170 Yonge Street, a spot which still serves as our reception center. For the first two years it was not only our 'headquarters,' it was all of Toronto AA.

We skip at 1945, and Stage II. Growth — and dissension. Fortunately, growth was outdoing dissension and growing pains can be very painful. Our pains were mostly located in the area of the pancreas — or the 'gripe' area. The complaint took the form of 'we-don't-like-the-way-things-are-being-run.' It was later diagnosed as labor pains. It was the birth of Group number two.

In the ensuing six years the birth rate has mounted steadily. We have 33 little groups running around the house these days. Thriving little beggars they are. Well mannered too. No brats. If you, by some happy fate, were to drop in for a visit, you'd find the entire family most happy to welcome you warmly.

The U.S. - Canada line is the longest unfortified international border in the world. But even if you're a Yank bent on looting like those uncouth fellows in 1813, come right along. We'll gladly let you take anything that isn't nailed down. Because we know that *no* one can take away our most cherished possession — the happy, contented sobriety we have found in AA here in Toronto.