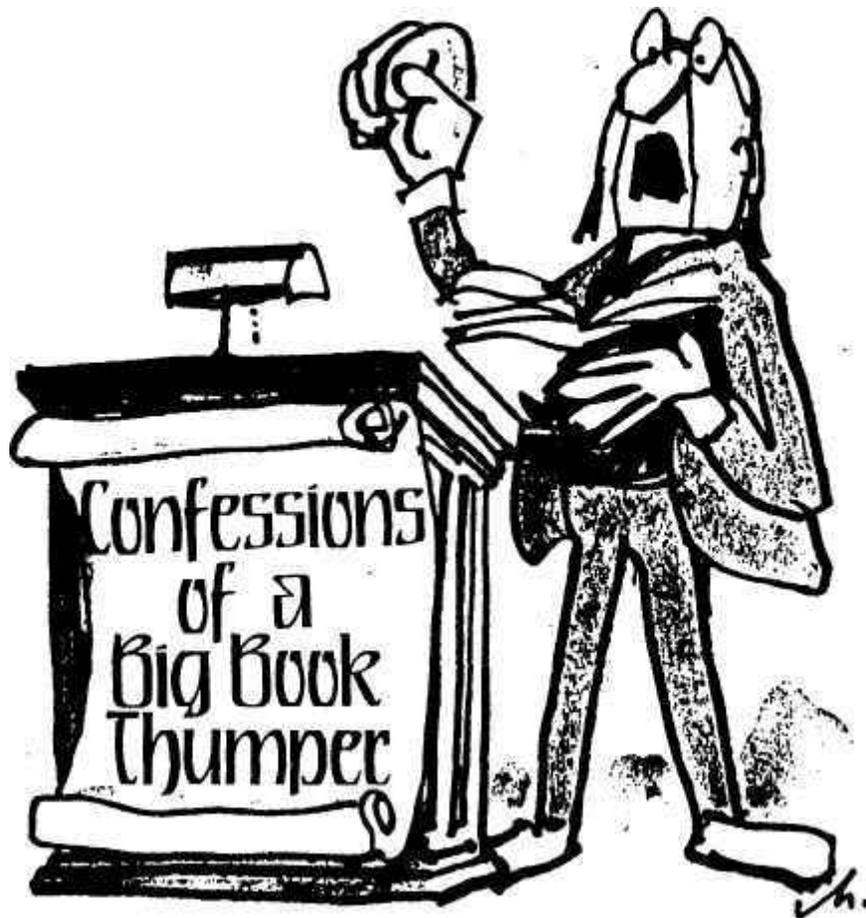


April 1989



I had a very close friend from Texas, where I got sober, who told me once, "Nobody can stand a walking Big Book." It is true that there are those of us who tend to cling a bit tightly to those precious first 164 pages and many of us refuse to listen or even argue when the conversation tends to drift into non-Conference-approved ways of looking at life, the universe, and sobriety. I am writing this in part to promote an under-

standing on the less-reactionary side, and partly to explain one alcoholic's reasons — or, if you prefer, excuses — for my hard-hat attitude on this sensitive subject.

In the old days, back before John Barleycorn became my constant companion, I was quite the bookworm. I read everything from science fiction to Plato, sure that the answers were on paper somewhere. I eventually gave up this idea and found at least

workable solutions in my shot glass. From my present perspective it now surprises me very little that having given up on any definite, workable way of life, I found one when I got sober via the medium I had first searched — the printed word. I went back to my pup tent that first night (such were my lodgings at the time) and proceeded to gobble down every word of the Big Book. Every line rang as clear and true as the smile on the chairman's face that first meeting night, and not one whit of it was anything I had ever seriously considered before. In my state of mind at the time, anything that wasn't my idea was probably a good idea. The phrases were full not just of information but of joy. I was free to be wrong and maybe this God fellow might not be so bad after all.

I believe that at this time I had an open mind, wide open and free of any prejudice against anything that I might have heard those first few weeks. It was as if I opened up my mind, cleared the shelves of all previous material, installed a Big Book and a "Twelve and Twelve" and then sealed it up tight. Having found an answer that had worked for so many others, I became unwilling to tamper with it in any way. I had messed up every gift I had ever received, and I was not willing to do that with this precious thing you had so graciously given me. The Book (the term included both pieces of literature) was not to be trifled with. Most Big Book Thumpers (BBTs) have similar stories

to relate in regard to their extreme bias. We seem to share many other traits, also.

In my trials as a BBT, I have found many recurring themes which it is entirely possible are not conducive to AA unity. Yet, I cannot help but harp on them to the annoyance, no doubt, of my fellow members. I am sure this tendency goes back to my old need to be right, but I forget this and assume I am merely "viewing with alarm for the good of the movement" — and I have Bill's own printed Word right here to back me up, helped along by the swift cut and accurate aim of my interpretation.

For instance, I am perfectly capable of running down a women's group that has been helping drunks for twenty years because the Tradition says "the only requirement for membership," etc.... I will glance askance at some drunk advising another drunk to slow down on some Step he is working, interrupting their seditious little session (uninvited, of course) with some comment like: "The only pause mentioned in the Book is on page 75, third paragraph, for one hour between Steps Five and Six." I am then free to return to my corner and recover, certain that justice has been served.

But this Big Book Thumping is not a form of hypocrisy. We BBTs are nothing if not honest Pharisees. We turn our perfectionist eyes ever inward. For instance, I am unable to watch TV. I will start to turn on the tube and...pick up the Book...check

"Give me an inch and I'll take the interstate. And so I go my merry way, refusing any advice that doesn't have a page number attached..."

the first 164...nope, doesn't mention TV. Never mind that TV had not been invented when the Book was written. If Bill and Dr. Bob didn't do it, then I had better steer clear. If I am asked to go water skiing — I'm sorry, it doesn't say a thing about water skiing in the Book. I can get away with golf (Bill played golf), but I can't comfortably go to even AA dances (doesn't mention dancing).

This preoccupation with a dogmatic view of the Book seems to be based on the belief that the human intellect is of no value at all. Given my record before AA, such a belief makes sense. However, where I make my mistake is in applying this judgment to you. I've assumed "you wanted, perfection, just as I did" (page 449). My tolerance is based, not on the certainty that you are wrong, but on the fear that you might not be — and that would mean that there is more than one valid way of seeing

things. The Book leaves many questions open, so I assume that means there are no answers meant for mortal drunks.

A week before this writing I was in conversation with an alcoholic with some five times my length of sobriety, when the man made an obvious error. I responded with — my favorite line! — "That's not what the Book says." His response startled me. He said, "This program is not about the Book. It's about people. I'm telling you what I have learned." Well! That's a fine how-de-do! After all, I was only trying to help (forgetting that I had called him, asking *his* help on a medical problem that we share which is only briefly mentioned in the Book).

It is denial, or something like it, that makes me want to gloss over the fact that there are certain phrases in the Book that I tend to ignore or even protest against. Ideas such as "Our book is meant to be suggested only" are obvious balderdash. Same thing goes for "More will be revealed," and "Here no specific rules can be given." These sentences leave one with the distinct impression that there is leeway involved in working this program — and leeway is something I cannot afford. Give me an inch and I'll take the interstate. And so I go my merry, rigid way, refusing any advice that doesn't have a page number attached, closing my ears if I hear something that sounds "tainted" by pop psychology or spiritual hedonism. "Straight is the way and narrow

is the gate" and sobriety is the "eye of the needle."

It is not my intention to portray BBTs as unfeeling automatons, spouting truisms they have never experienced, harping at those around them to do things their way, and running training camps for bleeding deacons. The truth is that BBTs stay sober. They are emphatic about the Book because it works and has worked for them consistently. I see this around me and have for some time.

I, of course, had role models (having never had an original thought) and picked those who had what I lacked. I was inconsistent, undependable, given to intellectual and emotional flights of fancy, and totally without a conception of a God who could help me. The people I saw who seemed to have solved these problems were those people who began sentences with the phrase, "The Book says" So I talked to them at length, and they told me that I,

too, could recover, just as they had.

It may be that you have someone like me in your group. If that is the case, there is no need to fear him or pick up a resentment. If such a person corners you and patiently tries to explain how something you said at a meeting was wrong, or some opinion you expressed is sure to get you drunk, it is not necessary to choose between running and fighting as your only viable options. Just quietly say "Thank you, but I don't have to be perfect today." If he's like I am, this response is sure to put his tail firmly in between his legs, forcing him to retreat and lick his wounds until he musters the gumption to apologize. And remember — he is a valuable asset to the group, for should anyone need to know where to find something in the Book, he is there, ready, willing and anxious, with page numbers on tap, to fulfill his function as a Big Book Thumper.

Anonymous, Athens, Ala.