

June 1947

# LACK OF MONEY PROVED A.A. BOON

*By Bill*

## "Missionaries?"

Thousands of newer A.A.s inquire, "Just what is The Alcoholic Foundation, what is its place in A.A., who set it up, why do we send it funds?"

Most members, because their groups are in frequent contact with our Headquarters in New York, understand that place to be a sort of a general service to all A.A. Reading *The A.A. Grapevine* each month, they know *The Grapevine* to be our principal monthly journal. But the history of The Alcoholic Foundation and its relation to those vital functions, and to A.A. as a whole, they scarcely understand at all.

Now for a bit of history. During its first years, Alcoholics Anonymous didn't even have that name. Anonymous, nameless indeed, we consisted by late 1937 of but three small clusters of alcoholics - Akron, Ohio, the first group; New York City, the second, and a few members at Cleveland, our third group to be. There were, I should guess, about 50 members in all three cities. The very early pioneering period had passed, Dr. Bob and I having first met at Akron in the spring of 1935. We were becoming sure we had something for those other thousands of alcoholics who didn't yet know any answer. How were we to let them know; just how could the news be spread? That was the burning question.

Much discussion in a little meeting called by Dr. Bob and me at Akron in the fall of 1937 developed a plan. This plan later proved to be approximately one-third right and about two-thirds wrong - familiar process of trial and error. Because the development of the first groups had been such a slow, hard process we then supposed that none but seasoned pioneers could start new ones. Though we had misgivings, it seemed inevitable that about 20 of our solid members would have to lay aside their personal affairs and go to other cities to create new centers. Much as we disliked the idea, it appeared as if we must take on, temporarily at least, a squad of A.A. missionaries. Plainly, too, these missionaries and their families would have to eat. That would take money - quite a lot of it, we thought.

But that was not all. It was felt we needed A.A. hospitals at Akron and New York, these places being regarded as our twin "Meccas." There excellent medical care and high power spirituality could, we were sure, be sprayed on drunks who would flock from all corners of the nation - once the magic word "cure" got around. Even as many newer A.A.s still have such fancies, we oldtimers did dream

these very dreams. Providentially, neither the A.A. hospital nor our wholesale missionary dreams came true. Had these then materialized, A.A. would surely have been ruined. We would have gone professional on the spot.

Then there was still a third dream. That was to prepare a Book of Experience - the one we know today as *Alcoholics Anonymous*. We were sure that unless our recovery experiences were put on paper, our principles and practices would soon be distorted. We might be ridiculed in the press. Besides, did we not owe at least a book to those alcoholics who couldn't get to our hospitals, or who, perchance, weren't reached right away by our advancing missionaries! As everybody knows, the A.A. book dream did come true - the other dreams didn't.

But it surely looked, in 1937, as though we must have considerable money. Perhaps it was because I lived at New York, where there is supposed to be lots of it, that I was designated to set about raising funds so our nameless movement might have its "field workers," hospitals and books. How simple it appeared. Did we not already have (in prideful imagination) the beginning of one

of the greatest social, medical, and spiritual developments of all time? Weren't we drunks all salesmen? Hadn't I been a Wall Street man? How easy to raise money for such a cause as ours!

The awakening from that money dream was rude. It soon appeared that people with money had little interest in drunks. As for our grandiose scheme of banding alcoholics together in squads, platoons and regiments - well, that was plainly fantastic, wasn't it? Drunks, people said, were difficult enough, one at a time. Why present each American community with an organized regiment of them? Hadn't the donors better put their money into something constructive - like tuberculosis or cancer? Or, why shouldn't they invest in the prevention of alcoholism? One more attempt to salvage hopeless drunks couldn't possibly succeed. Such were the answers to our plea for money.

Then, one day, in the midst of discouragement, something momentous happened. It was another of those critical turning points in A.A. of which we have seen so many that no man can call them coincidence. At the office of my physician brother-in-law, I was bemoaning, in typical alcoholic fashion, how little we poor drunks were appreciated, especially by men of means. I was telling my relative for the tenth time how we had to have money soon - or else. Listening patiently, he suddenly said, "I've got an idea. I used to know a man by the name of Dick R. He was somehow connected with the Rockefellers. But that was years ago. I wonder if he is still there, "let me

call up and find out." On what little events our destinies sometimes turn! How could either of us know that a simple phone message was to open a new era in A.A.! That it was to inaugurate The Alcoholic Foundation, the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* and our A.A. Central Office.

### Encouragement

Two days after my brother-in-law's call, we sat in the Rockefeller offices talking to Dick R. The most lovable of men, Dick was the first of that early series of non-alcoholic laymen who saw us through when the going was very hard; and without whose wisdom and devotion the Alcoholics Anonymous movement might never have been. When he had heard the story, our new friend showed instant understanding. He immediately translated understanding into action. He suggested that some of our alcoholic brotherhood meet with several of his own friends and himself.

Shortly afterward, on a winter's evening in 1937, this meeting took place at Rockefeller Center. Present were Dick R., A. Leroy C., since known as "Chip," Albert S., Frank A., and my brother-in-law, Leonard S. Dr. Bob and Paul S. came down from Akron. The New York ex-topers numbered half a dozen and were accompanied by Dr. William D. Silkworth, who, as the first physician ever to champion our cause, had already given us measureless help and encouragement. Of course, we alcoholics were delighted. Our money troubles, we

thought, were over. If money was the answer, we had surely come to the right place!

Following introductions, each alcoholic told his own personal story, these accounts being enthusiastically confirmed by our ardent friend, Dr. Silkworth. After which (with becoming reluctance!) we brought up the subject of money. As our hearers had seemed much impressed by our recovery stories, we made bold to expand on the urgent need for hospitals, "field workers" and a book. We also made it clear that this would take money - quite a lot.

### Turn in Destiny

Then came one more turn in A.A. destiny. The chairman of the meeting, Albert Scott (now deceased), a man of large affairs, and profoundly spiritual in his nature, said in substance, "I am deeply moved by what I have heard. I can see that your work, thus far, has been one of great good will - one alcoholic personally helping another for the love of the thing. That is First Century Christianity in a beautiful form. But aren't you afraid that the introduction of hospitals and paid field workers might change all that? Shouldn't we be careful *not to do anything* which might lead to a *professional or propertied* class within your ranks?"

These were great words for Alcoholics Anonymous. We alcoholics admitted their weight. Disappointed that our hope of substantial money help seemed to be fading, we confessed,

nevertheless, that we had often had such misgivings. But, we persisted, what *are* we going to do? It has taken us three years to form three groups. We know we have a new life for those who die or go mad by thousands each year. Must our story wait while it is passed around by word of mouth only, becoming hopelessly garbled meanwhile? Finally our friends agreed that something needed to be done. But they did continue to insist our movement ought never be professionalised. This struck the keynote of our relation to these men of good will for all the years since. Rightly enough they have never secured us large sums of money. But each has given of himself to our cause, generously and continuously; how much, few A.A.s can ever know.

Seeing clearly that we must now spread the recovery message faster, they then suggested we might carefully experiment with a small rest home at Akron. This could be presided over by Dr. Bob who was, after all, a physician. Where upon early in 1938, Frank A., on his own time and with expenses paid by his associates, went to Akron to investigate. He returned most enthusiastic. He was inclined to the opinion that \$30,000 ought to be invested in a center for alcoholics. Our friend, Dick R., showed Frank's report to Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who at once manifested a warm interest. But Mr. Rockefeller also expressed anxiety about professionalising us. Nevertheless, he

gave us a sum which turned out to be, however, about one-sixth of the amount Frank had suggested. His gift came in the spring of 1938 and its result was to help Dr. Bob and me through that very trying year. We could not have actively continued without it. Yet, money wise, our budding movement of alcoholics was still left very much on its own - just where it should have been left, too, however difficult that seemed at the time. We still had no "field staff," no hospital and no book.

These were the events that led to the formation of The Alcoholic Foundation. The need for a volume describing our recovery experiences loomed larger than ever. Were such a book to appear a great flow of inquiries from alcoholics and their families might start. Thousands, maybe. These appeals would certainly have to be cleared through some sort of Central Office. That was most evident.

### **Everything but Money**

For these saner purposes, our friends suggested the formation of a Foundation to which givers might make tax free contributions. We alcoholics endlessly discussed this new project with them, consuming hours of their business time. Frank A. and a friendly attorney, Jeff W., put much effort on the original Foundation Trust agreement. The lawyer had never seen anything like it. The new

Foundation should, we insisted, have two classes of trustees - alcoholics and non-alcoholics. But, legally speaking, what was an alcoholic anyhow, he queried, and if an alcoholic had stopped drinking, was he an alcoholic any more? Then, why two classes of Trustees? That, said our attorney, was unheard of. We explained that we wanted our friends with us. And besides, we urged, suppose all of us alcoholics should get drunk at once, who then would hang on to the money! Surmounting many such obstacles, The Alcoholic Foundation was finally inaugurated. It had four non-alcoholics and three alcoholic Trustees. They could appoint their own successors. It was chartered to do everything under the sun. So it had everything - except money!