

The Alcoholic Foundation Was Brimming With Hope

(Second in a series giving a condensed history of A.A.)

THE first meeting of the newly formed trust, The Alcoholic Foundation, on August 11, 1938, was brimming with hope, but little else. The handful of drunks—scarcely 60 counting Akron, Cleveland and New York—still had no funds, no public standing and no name.

Efforts to solicit contributions from "interested persons" who proved to be not too interested, for The Alcoholic Foundation yielded zero. Except for a gift from John D. Rockefeller, the work might have died a-borning during the winter of 1938.

Nor did things get any better for several months, notwithstanding a great fanning of new hope kindled around the idea of publishing a book. Two chapters of the book had been roughed out by 1938 in response to earlier discussions of the need for this kind of a medium for

getting the story out to other fellow drunks who had not yet heard that there was a new way to sober up with at least some degree of permanency.

The group decided to publish the book themselves and raise the money to do it, through sale of stock. The Works Publishing Co. was organized and stock was sold to fellow alcoholics and anyone else who could be tagged at a price of \$25 per share. Forty-nine persons bought shares, none over \$300 worth and the majority in smaller lots. This effort raised \$4,500 and in addition a loan of \$2,500 was obtained from Charles B. Town, proprietor of Town Hospital in New York, where A.A.'s good medical friend Dr. W. D. Silkworth was chief of staff.

THE book was finished by April, 1939, and the spirit of the yet unnamed A.A. soared. But almost immediately came two setbacks.

First, it was discovered that 12 other books had already been given the name chosen for the alcoholic book, *The Way Out*. Second, the national magazine which had promised to print an article about the new way out as soon as the book was published, changed its mind, quite understandably because of the controversial nature of the subject and because the new technique had scarcely proved itself.

The first problem was solved happily with the selection of the title, *Alcoholics Anonymous*. No one knew it then but that was when the movement actually got the name by which it has been known since. The second disappointment, however, was more acute because the magazine article had been anticipated as the chief stimulant for the sale of the book.

So, the fledgling authors and publishers were left with 5,000 copies of an unwanted book, except for the few they had given away free. The printer's bill was only half paid, not to mention the 49 subscriptions amounting to \$4,500 and the \$2,500 loan which were to have been repaid out of the sale of the book. Whether the year 1938 or 1939 was low ebb for the new movement could be debated, but perhaps the latter should get the edge for gloomy outlook.

DURING this period, the group was using an office in Newark, which originally had been Bill's

and no funds!

business office but gradually was turned over more and more to the new work. They kept the office by several narrow squeaks, a deputy sheriff actually appearing once with a paper to disposes them.

But one of the original group mortgaged his own business to raise a loan of \$1,000 to keep the wolf at least with no more than one foot inside the front door and there followed two fortunate turns of destiny, or whatever you may want to call it. In the fall of 1939, *Liberty* magazine published an article about this new way out and shortly afterwards the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* published a series of pieces. The movement began to grow, particularly in Cleveland and Akron.

Then, the Rockefeller friends came through again, this time with a dinner given by Mr. Rockefeller in March, 1940. Although Mr. Rockefeller was unable to attend because of illness, his son, Nelson Rockefeller, explained his father's deep interest in the new movement and his intention to give it further financial help. The gifts resulting from that dinner averaged about \$3,000 annually for five years when The Alcoholic Foundation was able to send out word that they were no longer needed—A.A. had become self-supporting. (To be continued)