

June 1951

As this issue goes to press 37 AAs are 'carrying the message' — a *new* message — across the U.S. and Canada. As delegates to the First General Service Conference they now return to their homes, not as the 'voice' of AA but as its 'conscience.' They participated in an historic moment. One to compare with the providential meeting of Bill and Dr. Bob; with the *Big Book*; with the 12 Steps; with the 12 Traditions. In the name of all AAs everywhere they have claimed our heritage — and begun the task of taking over responsibility of our beloved society and to perpetuate it for 'the millions who still don't know.'



Editorial

To Serve Is To Live

by *BILL*

OUR first General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous gathered at New York City in April, 1951. It was composed of thirty-seven U.S. and Canadian delegates plus AA's General Service Headquarters staff and Trustees. The single purpose of our Conference was: to serve AA throughout the world.

This unexciting statement now carries a deep meaning for all who were there. We came to believe that AA's future had been made secure. We became certain that AA could live for so long as God might need us.

Why did each witness of the Conference feel so deeply about it? I think for two reasons: the Group Conscience of all Alcoholics Anonymous was heard to speak for the first time. And we realized, as never before, how perilous "faith without works" might really become. So it was, that AA's Group Conscience heard its first high call to service.

Making this plainer, let's look for a moment at a single AA member. Faith alone does not save him. He has to act, do something. He must *carry* his message to others,

practice AA principles in all his affairs. Else he slips, he withers and he dies. Look now at an AA Group. Can pure faith, mere belief in right principle and sound tradition, make the Group a going concern? Not in the least. Each AA Group, as such, must also function, do something. It must serve its appointed purposes or it, too, withers and falls apart.

Now our Conference delegates were able to apply this principle to *AA as a whole*. The delegates could see far beyond the single AA and his particular Group. In a flash, they took in the stark fact that *AA as a whole* must continue to function or else it might well suffer that common penalty of faith without works. Which is: disintegration. Gone was the comfortable illusion that should each AA Group tend strictly its own affairs God would then reward our shortsightedness by guarding AA as a whole entirely by himself — including our Headquarters, AA's public relations and the welfare of the "Million who still don't know." The delegates saw that this would spell faith without work and without responsibility. That could never be. Of course much work would always have to be done, much responsibility would have to be taken by many. To AA as a whole, every member would need to give a little.

Of age now, our fellowship would have to begin looking after its own vital Services; these couldn't

be thoughtlessly left in the sole custody of our isolated, unknown and unsupported Board of Trustees. The work of our Foundation and AA's "GHQ" would have to become widely understood and directly backed up by AA itself. Nothing was plainer, thought the delegates. When therefore, you next see your local Conference member, you may find him talking something like this:

"Thanks for sending me to New York. I've just spent three days at AA's World Headquarters. Our Trustees, General Office and *Grapevine* people turned the place inside out so we delegates might vision its past, present and future. What we saw and felt was startling.

Very suddenly we got the feeling of AA as a whole. We looked out upon a fellowship of surpassing unity, one on which the sun never sets, a world communion four thousand times larger than a single AA Group.

We then realized that this wonder had been made possible by the devoted service of a few; those Headquarters workers whose decade and more of labor had enabled us in distant fields to garner that great harvest of 120,000 fellow sufferers into the safety of our fold, and into the affectionate respect of the whole world. Our unseen servants at the Foundation had done all this because Dr. Bob and Bill had asked them to.

But now they were saying to us

delegates, "Soon you must lend a hand. These are AA's Arms of Service, these are our Traditions. Come and help us administer them; times have changed, we oldsters are perishable. This is your Legacy of Service. Please accept it now and guard it well."

On its next pages, *Grapevine* will report our Conference in some detail. So I paragraph here only a little of what I know the delegates carried home in their hearts.

The Conference scene that Sunday afternoon we last met will always be a precious memory in the annals of AA. For in that historic assemblage we could all hear the

Voice of Alcoholics Anonymous. These were the words: "To serve AA is to live. We gladly accept our Third Legacy and may we guard it well and use it wisely. God grant that the Legacy of Service remain ever safe in our keeping.

In that fine hour the torch of Service did pass from the hands of us who are older to yours, which are younger; it passed to every oncoming generation of those Children of the Night whose darkness, God willing, shall be banished within the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous all through the bright years which Destiny surely holds in store for us.

