

March 1963

Are you one of the new delegates to this April's General Service Conference? The Conference is custodian of AA Traditions, so even if you're not, you may find yourself asking

What's This Delegate Business?

FOR a long time my AA life consisted in going to meetings, helping in my local group, making such Twelfth-Step calls as might come my way, and trying to apply the Steps in all my affairs. Then one day I was tapped for a service job and all of a sudden, bam—there I was smack in the middle of an annual General Service Conference in New York, not as a delegate, but as a participating member.

That this should happen to me! I abhor administrative and committee work. In more than a decade of AA sobriety I had not given more than a half hour's thought to the national organization. I knew in a general way that something holds AA in trust for future generations of drunks, guards and publishes its traditions, and helps channel its message all over this country and the world.

But I was the type of local group officer to growl "Now what's this 'delegate' business?" when the time

came to elect the group GSR. I'd back the three-dollars-per-member-per-year-for-headquarters rule of thumb as a matter of grim duty. Now here I was, part of the Conference itself, with an inside seat at its goings-on. I had to learn fast. These are some of the things I had to learn:

When Bill and Bob started AA it was somewhat like two fellows who suddenly found they had invented the storied better mousetrap. At first nobody wanted the new device except a few neighbors. Production needs could easily be met by putting in a few hours in the basement. Then suddenly they were faced with the need to build a mousetrap factory, with corporate boards assuring perpetual management, and to establish means of world-wide distribution. By the time I came into the picture the original mousetrap-makers and their associates had been through several phases of this problem. This is no place to review the whole history of

their efforts in this sphere. I just report what the situation was when I was plunked into the middle of it:

AA's Traditions and decision-making authority resides in the membership itself—about 300,000 people. Its affairs are managed along the lines of democratic representative government, so it will help if you keep the U. S. governmental system in mind as we go along. Instead of states, AA has about 85 "areas," each containing a number of "districts," corresponding roughly to counties. General Service Representatives from local groups choose a district member to represent them on the Area Committee; then they choose one of these Area Committeemen to represent the area in the annual meeting of the General Service Conference in New York—which corresponds to the U. S. Congress in Washington.

Just as in the U. S. government there are checks and balances against undue concentrations of power—legislative, executive and judicial in a cycle of mutual restraint—so with AA. Though the Conference (Congress) holds all power for those it represents, some of this power is delegated to a General Service Office or GSO (Executive Branch) and some to a board of trustees called the General Service Board (judicial), and each branch exercises some restraints on the others. Realizing that no democracy is really democratic unless a free press is maintained where citizens can voice concerns



about any one or all three branches of their government, an AA "free press"—the *Grapevine*—was set up as a separate corporation wholly owned by the board of trustees, with safeguards protecting the right of any individual citizen of the democracy to be heard. I use the illustration of "government" here only to show parallels in structure. AA's Second Tradition specifically says its leaders do not govern, but are trusted servants, and only so long as group conscience makes them so.

And this group conscience must function. Your delegate is representing groups and individuals within his area. These groups and these individuals must do some home-work prior to the convention. Delegates who have been there before should inform them on issues likely to come before the next Conference. These issues should be discussed fully and the groups should reach conclusions on what they want for AA. Your delegate is not coming to New York just for a trip and to air his personal opinions on whatever comes up. He

should come grounded in his area's thinking and ready to work for AA's best interest.

So there I was, seated in a big room in a New York hotel. There were wonderful AAs from all over the U. S., Canada and a few from other countries. The Conference lasts for five days. Something is going on up there on the podium morning, noon and night, and believe me, my fellow recovered alcoholics, you get a fill-in on what's going on in AA.

The work of the Conference may be divided into three parts—hearing reports, asking questions, making decisions. Just to give you a little preview of what's going to happen at the April, 1963 Conference, I mention a few of the things tossed in our laps *last* April:

Hearing Reports: One-minute area highlights from all 85 areas. Inspiring talks by Bill, by former non-alcoholic board of trustees chairman, Bernard Smith, and by the present non-alcoholic chairman Dr. John Norris. Run-down on Bill's Twelve Concepts for World Service and his Seven Recommendations for the General Service Board. Reports on AA in institutions, in relation to other agencies, in overseas groups, in public information media. Work of the committees on literature, on finance, on the 1965 International Convention in Toronto, on policy. Activities of the General Service Office, of the *Grapevine*, of group services, of the directory compilers, of internationalists and loners.

Asking questions: You should have heard them! Why do you do this instead of that? Why don't we try this, it's needed, and isn't it high time that situation was looked into? Who gets paid how much for doing what? And the finest and most frequently asked question of all—what can we in the groups do to help?

Making decisions: The big decision of 1962 was making Bill's Twelve Concepts for World Service a part of the Third Legacy Manual and hence part of AA's world self-management system. Interested? Write to the General Service Office of AA, 18th Floor, 305 E. 45th Street, New York 17, New York and get a copy of the Twelve Concepts—it's eye-opening reading. While about it, you may also want to ask for Bill's Seven Recommendations and read them too. The first one, which proposed that a majority of the board of trustees be made up of AAs (the board majority is now required to be non-AA) was turned down in 1962. It caused us all to think in terms of AA's future, of the millions of suffering alcoholics we have not yet reached, and of the quality of our leadership, now and in years to come.

When I look back, I can only marvel at the people the Higher Power lined up to get AA rolling. It begins with a suggestion by one of the great thinkers of all time, Dr. Carl Jung. Next in line was Dr. Sam Shoemaker, an intellectual light among clergymen, then the great and beloved Dr. Silkworth and then Bill, once among

the brilliant young minds of Wall Street. Then Dr. Bob, the wise physician. Bill, inspired by a transcendent vision, became one of the memorable spiritual leaders of our time, a great inspirational writer and the architect of AA democracy. This took brains, my fellow recovered alcoholics—and spiritual inspiration, and selfless dedication. It may well cause us to think where we shall find people of remotely comparable caliber to carry on. It reminds us of the importance

of the decisions now being made concerning AA's future leadership.

As you see, just one Conference under my belt and I'm now really into it. I just hope all AAs, when it comes to choosing the delegate they'll send to represent them at the Conference, will not settle for just anybody who happens to be available, but will cast about for the best brains around, not forgetting the understanding heart and knowing spirit.

E. & M., Manhattan, N. Y.