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Alcoholics Anonymous Makes Its Stand Here

Part 1 of 5

By ELRICK B. DAVIS

Much has been written about Alcoholics Anonymous, an organization doing major work in reclaiming the habitual drinker. This is the first of a series describing the work the group is doing in Cleveland.

Success

By now it is a rare Clevelander who does not know, or know of, at least one man or woman of high talent whose drinking had become a public scandal, and who suddenly has straightened out "over night," as the saying goes—the liquor habit licked. Men who have lost \$15,000 a year jobs have them back again. Drunks who have taken every "cure" available to the most lavish purse, only to take them over again with equally spectacular lack of success, suddenly have become total abstainers, apparently without anything to account for their reform. Yet something must account for the seeming miracle. Something does.

Alcoholics Anonymous has reached the town.

Fellowship

Every Thursday evening at the home of some ex-drunk in Cleveland, 40 or 50 former hopeless rummies meet for a social evening during which they buck each other up. Nearly every Saturday evening they and their families have a party — just as gay as any other party held that evening despite the fact that there is nothing alcoholic to drink. From time to time they have a picnic, where everyone has a roaring good time without the aid of even one bottle of beer. Yet these are men and women who, until recently, had scarcely been sober a day for years, and members of their families who all that time had been emotionally distraught, social and economic victims of another's addition.

These ex-rummies, as they call themselves, suddenly salvaged from the most socially noisome of fates, are the members of the Cleveland Fellowship of an informal society called "Alcoholics Anonymous." Who they are cannot be told, because the name means exactly what it says. But any incurable alcoholic who really wants to be cured will find the members of the Cleveland chapter eager to help.

The society maintains a "blind" address: The Alcoholic Foundation, Box 657, Church Street Annex Postoffice, New York City. Inquiries made there are forwarded to a Cleveland banker, who is head of the local Fellowship, or to a former big league ball player who is recruiting officer of the Akron Fellowship, which meets Wednesday evenings in a mansion loaned for the purpose by a non-alcoholic supporter of the movement.

Cured

The basic point about Alcoholics Anonymous is that it is a fellowship of "cured" alcoholics. And that both old-line medicine and modern psychiatry had agreed on the one point that no alcoholic could be cured. Repeat the astounding fact:

These are cured.

They have cured each other.

They have done it by adopting, with each other's aid, what they call "a spiritual way of life."

"Incurable" alcoholism is not a moral vice. It is a disease. No dipsomaniac drinks because he wants to. He drinks because he can't help drinking.

He will drink when he had rather die than take a drink. That is why so many alcoholics die as suicides. He will get drunk on the way home from the hospital or sanitarium that has just discharged him as "cured." He will get drunk at the wake of a friend who died of drink. He will swear off for a year, and suddenly find himself half-seas over, well into another "bust." He will get drunk at the gates of an insane asylum where he has just visited an old friend, hopeless victim of "wet brain."

Prayer

These are the alcoholics that "Alcoholics Anonymous" cures. Cure is impossible until the victim is convinced that nothing that he or a "cure" hospital can do, can help. He must know that his disease is fatal. He must be convinced that he is hopelessly sick of body, and of mind — and of soul. He must be eager to accept help from any source — even God.

Alcoholics Anonymous has a simple explanation for an alcoholic's physical disease. It was provided them by the head of one of New York City's oldest and most famous "cure" sanitariums. The alcoholic is [allergic](#) to alcohol. One drink sets up a poisonous craving that only more of the poison can assuage. That is why after the first drink the alcoholic cannot stop.

They have a psychiatric theory equally simple and convincing. Only an alcoholic can understand another alcoholic's mental processes and state. And they have an equally simple, if unorthodox, conception of God.

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Alcoholics Anonymous Makes Its Stand Here

Part 2 of 5

By ELRICK B. DAVIS

In a previous installment, Mr. Davis outlined the plan of Alcoholics Anonymous, an organization of former drinkers who have found a solution to liquor in association for mutual aid. This is the second of a series.

Religion

There is no blinking the fact that Alcoholics Anonymous, the amazing society of ex-drunks who have cured each other of an incurable disease, is religious. Its members have cured each other frankly with the help of God. Every cured member of the Cleveland Fellowship of the society, like every cured member of the other chapters now established in Akron, New York, and elsewhere in the country, is cured with the admission that he submitted his plight wholeheartedly to a Power Greater than Himself.

He has admitted his conviction that science cannot cure him, that he cannot control his pathological craving for alcohol himself, and that he cannot be cured by the prayers, threats, or pleas of his family, employers, or friends. His cure is a religious experience. He had to have God's aid. He had to submit to a spiritual housecleaning.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a completely informal society, wholly latitudinarian in every respect but one. It prescribes a simple spiritual discipline, which must be followed rigidly every day. The discipline is fully explained in a book published by the society.

Discipline

That is what makes the notion of the cure hard for the usual alcoholic to take, at first glance, no matter how complete his despair. He wants to join no cult. He has lost faith, if he ever had it, in the power of religion to help him. But each of the cures accomplished by Alcoholics Anonymous is a spiritual awakening. The ex-drunk has adopted what the society calls "a spiritual way of life."

How, then, does Alcoholics Anonymous differ from the other great religious movements which have changed social history in America? Wherein does the yielding to God that saves a member of this society from his fatal disease, differ from that which brought the Great Awakening that Jonathan Edwards preached, or the New Light revival of a century ago, or the flowering of Christian Science, or the camp meeting evangelism of the old Kentucky-Ohio frontier, or the Oxford Group successes nowadays?

Every member of Alcoholics Anonymous may define God to suit himself. God to him may be the Christian God defined by the Thomism of the Roman Catholic Church. Or the stern Father of the Calvinist. Or the Great Manitou of the American Indian. Or the Implicit Good

assumed in the logical morality of Confucius. Or Allah, or Buddha, or the Jehovah of the Jews. Or Christ the Scientist. Or no more than the Kindly Spirit implicitly assumed in the "atheism" of a Col. Robert Ingersoll.

Aid

If the alcoholic who comes to the fellowship for help believes in God, in the specific way of any religion or sect, the job of cure is easier. But if all that the pathological drunk can do is to say, with honesty, in his heart: "Supreme Something, I am done for without more-than-human help," that is enough for Alcoholics Anonymous to work on. The noble prayers, the great literatures, and the time-proved disciplines of the established religions are a great help. But as far as the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous is concerned, a pathological drunk can call God "It" if he wants to, and is willing to accept Its aid. If he'll do that, he can be cured.

Poll of "incurable" alcoholics who now, cured, are members of the Cleveland Fellowship of the society, shows that this has made literally life-saving religious experience possible to men and women who, otherwise, could not have accepted spiritual help. Poll shows also that collectively their religious experience has covered every variety known to religious psychology. Some have had an experience as blindingly bright as that which struck down Saul on the road to Damascus. Some are not even yet intellectually convinced except to the degree that they see that living their lives on a spiritual basis has cured them of a fatal disease. Drunk for years because they couldn't help it, now it never occurs to them to want a drink. Whatever accounts for that, they are willing to call "God."

Some find more help in formal religion than do others. A good many of the Akron chapter find help in the practices of the Oxford Group. The Cleveland chapter includes a number of Catholics and several Jews, and at least one man to whom "God" is "Nature." Some practice family devotions. Some simply cogitate about "It" in the silence of their minds. But that the Great Healer cured them with only the help of their fellow ex-drunks, they all admit.

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Alcoholics Anonymous Makes Its Stand Here

Part 3 of 5

By ELRICK B. DAVIS

In two previous articles, Mr. Davis told of Alcoholics Anonymous, an organization of former drinkers, banded to overcome their craving for liquor and to help others to forego the habit. This is the third of a series.

Help

The ex-drunks cured of their medically incurable alcoholism by membership in Alcoholic Anonymous, know that the way to keep themselves from backsliding is to find another

pathological alcoholic to help. Or to start a new man toward cure. That is the way that the Akron chapter of the society, and from that, the Cleveland fellowship was begun.

One of the earliest of the cured rummies had talked a New York securities house into taking a chance that he was really through with liquor. He was commissioned to do a stock promotion chore in Akron. If he should succeed, his economic troubles also would be cured. Years of alcoholism had left him bankrupt as well as a physical and social wreck before Alcoholics Anonymous had saved him.

His Akron project failed. Here he was on a Saturday afternoon in a strange hotel in a town where he did not know a soul, business hopes blasted, and with scarcely money enough to get him back to New York with a report that would leave him without the last job he knew of for him in the world. If ever disappointment deserved drowning, that seemed the time. A bunch of happy folk were being gay at the bar.

At the other end of the lobby the Akron church directory was framed in glass. He looked up the name of a clergyman. The cleric told him of a woman who was worried about a physician who was a nightly solitary drunk. The doctor had been trying to break himself of alcoholism for twenty years. He had tried all of the dodges: Never anything but light wines or beer; never a drink alone; never a drink before his work was done; a certain few number of drinks and then stop; never drink in a strange place; never drink in a familiar place; never mix the drinks; always mix the drinks; never drink before eating; drink only while eating; drink and then eat heavily to stop the craving — and all of the rest.

Every alcoholic knows all of the dodges. Every alcoholic has tried them all. That is why an uncured alcoholic thinks someone must have been following him around to learn his private self-invented devices, when a member of Alcoholics Anonymous talks to him. Time comes when any alcoholic has tried them all, and found that none of them work.

Support

The doctor had just taken his first evening drink when the rubber baron's wife telephoned to ask him to come to her house to meet a friend from New York. He dared not, his wife would not, offend her by refusing. He agreed to go on his wife's promise that they would leave after 15 minutes. His evening jitters were pretty bad.

He met the New Yorker at 5 o'clock. They talked until 11:15. After that he stayed "dry" for three weeks. Then he went to a convention in Atlantic City. That was a bender. The cured New Yorker was at his bedside when he came to. That was June 10, 1935. The doctor hasn't had a drink since. Every Akron and Cleveland cure by Alcoholics Anonymous is a result.

The point the society illustrates by that bit of history is that only an alcoholic can talk turkey to an alcoholic. The doctor knew all of the "medicine" of his disease. He knew all of the psychiatry. One of his patients had "taken the cure" 72 times. Now he is cured, by fellowship in Alcoholics Anonymous. Orthodox science left the physician licked. He also knew all of the excuses, as well as the dodges, and the deep and fatal shame that makes a

true alcoholic sure at last that he can't win. Alcoholic death or the bughouse will get him in time.

The cured member of Alcoholics Anonymous likes to catch a prospective member when he is at the bottom of the depths. When he wakes up of a morning with his first clear thought regret that he is not dead before he hears where he has been and what he has done. When he whispers to himself: "Am I crazy?" and the only answer he can think of is: "Yes." Even when the bright-eyed green snakes are crawling up his arms.

Then the pathological drinker is willing to talk. Even eager to talk to someone who really understands, from experience, what he means when he says: "I can't understand myself."

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Alcoholics Anonymous Makes Its Stand Here

Part 4 of 5

By ELRICK B. DAVIS

In three previous articles, Mr. Davis has told of Alcoholics Anonymous, an organization of former drinkers banded to break the liquor habit and to save others from over drinking. This is the fourth of a series.

Understanding

What gets the pathological drinker who finally has reached such state that he is willing to listen to a cured rummy member of Alcoholics Anonymous, is that the retrieved alcoholic not only understands what only another alcoholic can understand, but a great deal that the unreformed drunk thinks no one else could know because he has never told anyone, and his difficulties or escapades must be private to his own history.

Fact is the history of all alcoholics is the same; some have been addicts longer than others, and some have painted brighter red patches around the town — that is all. What they have heard in the "cure" hospitals they have frequented, or from the psychoanalysts they have consulted, or the physicians who have tapered them off one bender or another at home, has convinced them that alcoholism is a disease. But they are sure (a) that their version of the disease differs from everyone else's and (b) that in them it hasn't reached the incurable stage anyway.

Head of the "cure" told them: "If you ever take another drink, you'll be back."

Psychoanalyst said "Psychologically, you have never been weaned. Your subconscious is still trying to get even with your mother for some forgotten slight." Family or hotel physician said "If you don't quite drinking, you'll die."

Reproof

Lawyers, ministers, business partners and employers, parents and wives, also are professionally dedicated to listening to confidences and accepting confessions without undue complaint. But the clergyman may say: "Your drinking is a sin." And partner or employer: "You'll have to quit this monkey business or get out." And wife or parent: "This drinking is breaking my heart." And everyone: "Why don't you exercise some will power and straighten up and be a man."

"But," the alcoholic whispers in his heart. "No one but I can know that I must drink to kill suffering too great to stand."

He presents his excuses to the retrieved alcoholic who has come to talk. Can't sleep without liquor. Worry. Business troubles. Debt. Alimentary pains. Overwork. Nerves too high strung. Grief. Disappointment. Deep dark phobic fears. Fatigue. Family difficulties. Loneliness.

The catalog has got no farther than that when the member of Alcoholics Anonymous begins rattling off an additional list.

"Hogwash," he says. "Don't try those alibis on me. I have used them all myself."

Understanding

And then he tells his own alcoholic history, certainly as bad, perhaps far worse than the uncured rummy's. They match experiences. Before he knows it the prospect for cure has told his new friend things he had never admitted even to himself. A rough and ready psychiatry, that, but it works, as the cured members of the Cleveland Chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous all are restored to society to testify. And that is the reason for the fellowship's weekly gatherings. They are testimonial meetings. The members meet to find new victims to cure, and to buck each other up. For years their social and emotional life has all been elbow-bending. Now they provide each other a richer society to replace the old. Hence, the fellowship's family parties and picnics.

Never for a moment do they forget that a practicing alcoholic is a very sick person. Never for a moment can they forget that even medical men who know the nature of the disease are apt to feel that failure to recover is a proof of moral perversity in the patient. If a man is dying of cancer, no one says: "Why doesn't he exercise some will power and kill that cancer off." If he is coughing his lungs out with tuberculosis, no one says: "Buck up and quit coughing; be a man." They may say to the first: "Submit to surgery before it is too late;" to the second: "Take a cure before you are dead."

Religion

Retrieved alcoholics talk in that fashion to their uncured fellows. They say: "You are a very sick man. Physically sick — you have an [allergy](#) to alcohol. We can put you in a hospital that will sweat that poison out. Mentally sick. We know how to cure that. And spiritually sick.

"To cure your spiritual illness you will have to admit God. Name your own God, or define Him to suit yourself. But if you are really willing to 'do anything' to get well, and if it is really true — and we know it is — that you drink when you don't want to and that you don't know why you get drunk, you'll have to quit lying to yourself and adopt a spiritual way of life. Are you ready to accept help?"

And the miracle is that, for alcoholics brought to agreement by pure desperation, so simple a scheme works.

Cleveland alone has 50 alcoholics, all former notorious drunks, now members of Alcoholics Anonymous to prove it. None is a fanatic prohibitionist. None has a quarrel with liquor legitimately used by people physically, nervously, and spiritually equipped to use it. They simply know that alcoholics can't drink and live, and that their "incurable" disease has been conquered.

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Alcoholics Anonymous Makes Its Stand Here

Part 5 of 5

By ELRICK B. DAVIS

In previous installments, Mr. Davis has told of Alcoholics Anonymous, an informal society of drinking men who have joined together to beat the liquor habit This is the last of five articles.

No Graft

It is hard for the skeptical to believe that no one yet has found a way to muscle into Alcoholics Anonymous, the informal society of ex-drunks that exists only to cure each other, and make a money-making scheme of it. Or that someone will not. The complete informality of the society seems to be what has saved it from that. Members pay no [dues](#). The society has no paid staff. Parties are "Dutch." Meetings are held at the homes of members who have houses large enough for such gatherings, or in homes of persons who may not be alcoholics but are sympathetic with the movement.

Usually a drunk needs hospitalization at the time that he is caught to cure. He is required to pay for that himself. Doubtless he hasn't the money. But probably his family has. Or his employer will advance the money to save him, against his future pay. Or cured members of the society will help him arrange credit, if he has a glimmer of credit left. Or old friends will help.

At the moment members of the Cleveland Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous are searching the slum lodging houses to find a man, once eminent in the city's professional life. A medical friend of his better days called them in to find him. This friend will pay the hospital bill necessary to return this victim of an "incurable" craving for drink to physical health, if the society will take him on.

The society has published a book, called "[Alcoholics Anonymous](#)," which it sells at \$3.50. It may be ordered from an anonymous address, Works Publishing Co., Box 657, Church Street Annex Postoffice, New York City; or bought from the Cleveland Fellowship of the society. There is no money profit for anyone in that book.

It recites the history of the society and lays down its principles in its first half. [Last half](#) is case histories of representative cures out of the first hundred alcoholics cured by membership in the society. It was written and compiled by the New York member who brought the society to Ohio. He raised the money on his personal credit to have the book published. He would like to see those creditors repaid. It is a 400-page book, for which any regular publisher would charge the same price. Copies bought from local Fellowships net the local chapters a dollar each.

The Rev. Dr. Dilworth Lupton, pastor of the First Unitarian Church of Cleveland, found in a religious journal an enthusiastic review of the book by the Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick, and sent it to the president of the local Fellowship. It has been similarly noted in some medical journals.

The Foundation

To handle the money that comes in for the book, and occasional gifts from persons interested in helping ex-drunks to cure other "incurable" drunks, the Alcoholics Foundation has been established, with a board of seven directors.

Three of these are members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Four are not alcoholics, but New Yorkers of standing interested in humane movements. Two of them happen also to be associated with the Rockefeller Foundation, but that does not associate the two foundations in any way.

First problem of the Cleveland Fellowship was to find a hospital willing to take a drunk in and give him the medical attention first necessary to any cure. Two reasons made that hard. Hospitals do not like to have alcoholics as patients; they are nuisances. And the society requires that as soon as a drunk has been medicated into such shape that he can see visitors, members of the society must be permitted to see him at any time. That has been arranged. The local society would like to have a kitty of \$100 to post with the hospital as evidence of good faith. But if it gets it, it will only be from voluntary contributions of members.

Meantime the members, having financed their own cures, spend enormous amounts of time and not a little money in helping new members. Psychiatrists say that if an alcoholic is to be cured, he needs a hobby. His old hobby had been only alcohol. Hobby of Alcoholics Anonymous is curing each other. Telephone calls, postage and stationery, gasoline bills, mount up for each individual. And hospitality to new members. A rule of the society is that each member's latch string is always out to any other member who needs talk or quiet, which may include a bed or a meal, at any time.

