

I show you this token of your affection, and Lois and I thank God for All that we have seen and heard and felt here in this last hour. This is not only a token of affection. This, as you see, symbolizes home - a home you tell me, of a person of distinction. But I know the DISTINCTION must be worn very lightly, else I turn back in the old path and perhaps become again a man of EXTINCTION.

This is a home that might never have been but, praise God, through His grace, was and is. And through all these troubled years of struggle and joy, it is your love which has sustained Lois and me beyond any measure; we thank you all so very deeply for this token of a home and this token of your affection.

Well, as Hilda said, times have changed, and as she spoke I thought of how much they had changed with reference to sin and sinners and "Deviationness". How well I remember that night when Hilda appeared, drunk, at the first A.A. dinner, and, as everybody knows, nothing can be so scornful as an A.A. group that's scared to death! How we looked down on this very low-cast woman! And now, praise God, how we do look up to her, and such is the divine paradox of which we are all the witnesses; and the witnesses increase in number.

Not long since, I saw the Twelve Steps in Japanese and I looked at these strange characters, and could not even wonder what it all meant. Then today as I came in the office, Annie M (who you know looks after our foreign affairs) said "Well, things are 'Humming' in Japan, Bill". She said, "You know, there is a Japanese here in town who is a sort of interpreter and mediator to the Japs and he says that things are really 'Humming' there. They have increased the Twelve Steps already from twelve to sixteen, and the price for ministering these steps to incoming drunks and defaulting Buddhists has now gone up to 100 Yen per copy!"

Years ago that would have scared us at the foundation almost as much as Hilda did at the dinner, but we know that sin and sinners and "Deviationness" - well, they're only one side of the coin which, on its other face, is marked good and true and wonderful. Ah, in these nineteen years only God knows how much has really transpired.

Between the time that John D said I was "On my knees in Towns" (which I was not; I was too weak to get on my knees! I lay on the bed) and the time our Japanese friends are busy expanding the Twelve Steps (which we know they will presently contract again to the figure 12) they are reenacting over there, the story of our pioneering time.

I asked several people what to talk about tonight, and no one could say exactly. Neither can I, but of late I think that we're getting history minded and little fragments out of the past begin to carry a deeper and deeper meaning. So, as I sat over there back of the piano, little chunks of the past began to appear before my eyes, and some I saw vividly. I saw myself, for example, on my knees (and this is a little-known episode).

You remember how my friend Ebby had come from this place over to 182 Clinton Street bearing to me the message that

if I would get honest with myself,

if I would talk it out in confidence with another,

if I would make amends for the harm that I had done,
if I would try the kind of giving that demands
no reward,
if I would - even as an experiment - pray to whatever
God there was,
and this was all prefaced by the deep admission

I couldn't manage my own life,
then there might be a release from this terrible obsession, alcoholism. You all know how he told that story over the kitchen table in Clinton Street in November, 1934.

Well, as the history book has it, I next appear in Towns where I had this very sudden and releasing experience. But there were some interludes.

After Ebby left, you know, I couldn't help but be deeply impressed, but I couldn't swallow the idea of God. The rest of it, yes, and already I knew my hopelessness; I had learned what alcoholism was like from Dr. Silkworth. And one afternoon I was very "Tight" and I got it into my head I should go over to Calvary Mission and look up Ebby who was then staying down there. (In those days that mission was an adjunct of this church and it's down here at the foot of 23rd.)

So I got in the subway, got off out here at this entrance, and started down 23rd. But I made very slow progress because I was getting into every bar, and I think it must have taken all the afternoon. And along about night-fall I had got down to the neighborhood of the mission and I found myself talking to a Finnish sailor. And he suddenly reminded me of my errand when he said that he was a fisherman, and then I thought "Oh yes, the mission! I must go and find these Fishers of Men!" So, the Finnish sailor and I "Lurched" in there and were nearly thrown out by good old "Tex" F who used to run it for the church - himself a recovered alcoholic then of 10 years maybe. And just about as Tex was rightfully ^{going to} give us the "Heave-Ho", Ebby looked over Tex's shoulder (I can remember how he grinned) and said "What about a plate of beans?" So we went around the corner and had the beans and it was about time for the meeting down there in the mission, and it was a typical mission meeting. There were hymns and testimonials and all that sort of thing; I sat beside Ebby, the Finn across the aisle. The place filled, the place smelled too, and I had heard a testimonial and all of a sudden (being like all drunks and loving to talk) I decided that I would testify!

So, I started down the aisle, Ebby for a while trying to restrain me holding on to my coat-tails, but I tore away from him. And I got down front where all we drunks love to be you know, and I testified! To what, I don't remember.

Then came the point at which the boys all kneel and give their life to God (sadly enough in those days, in the hope of beans rather than God) and I remember kneeling down there with all those folks off the Bowery, and as I knelt I felt a curious sense of presence - the premonition of what was to happen only a little while later.

I remember coming upstairs in the mission, having coffee, of sobering up very rapidly, having no hangover although I'd been drinking for days, walking home along 23rd Street saying "Maybe I'm in the edge of something", arriving home, to Lois' surprise, completely sober. utter

Yes, I was in the edge of it.

In a few days though, I was drinking again. In one interlude, we came over (Lois and I with Ebby and a friend) and we sat here in the church and the Oxford Groupers of that day testified from Sam's pulpit. And I remember again being terribly impressed with their candor, although it seemed too much in public, I was attracted and still I was a little bit repelled. How could they be so sure of God? And then I would remember that episode in the mission and say, "Well, maybe".

Then I would go back home and fall back on the gin again. So one day, realizing that beggars cannot be choosers, I said "I must go to Towns Hospital, get sober, and have a real look at this 'Deal'". So, up I went, again drunk, waving a bottle, came in, Dr. Silkworth looked at me, I shouted joyfully that I had something (the old man looked very cast down because he had told Lois the Summer before, there was no hope) and he said "I'm afraid you have, my boy. Get upstairs and go to bed."

Three days later my friend Ebby, who was practicing what he preached, stood in the door. He again repeated the simple formula which now lies at the core of our lives. He went away.

I fell into a ghastly depression, and in the midst of it I cried out "If there be a God, will he show himself!" And the place lit up, and I was aware of God as I never have been since. It was a great tremendous crashing experience, the central one of my whole life, and I instantly knew I was a free man. And the doctor, after talking with me a little, sensed it too. And the moment Lois laid eyes on me, she knew that the impossible had happened. And so it had.

Well, a few days after that experience I stood where I am now telling about it. The drunk appeared out of the audience who was drunk eleven years afterward, and 182 Clinton Street, Brooklyn began to fill with alcoholics. And I began to go up to the hospital and down to the old mission, and we'd have four or five of them living there at Clinton Street.

Meanwhile the good folks here at the church sort of deplored all this "Specialization" on drunks because, as you know, this building lies opposite the church, and in their enthusiasm they had just tried a batch of them, and had not lodged them in the mission, but had put them upstairs here in Calvary House, and one had cast a shoe out of the window - his window - and through one of the stained glass windows in the church. So they weren't enthusiastic at all about drunks.

Then we began to hold meetings over here in a restaurant. And the boys would come up from the mission and the sprinkling of the drunks then around the Oxford Group would come over there - over at Thompson's, I think it was - on 23rd Street. And it looked like a movement of drunks was starting within the Oxford Group Movement.

But the drunks didn't stay sober. They just couldn't get it. They couldn't stand this "Hot Flash" of mine! They couldn't stand the spiritual pace that the Oxford Groups put upon them. The Oxford

Groups were talking about absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love, and once in a while a drunk would "Buy It", but a week or two later he'd stub his toe and lose it.

I remember one day being very disconsolate, going up to see Dr. Silkworth. And at this point he added the thing that has since meant so much to us. Said he to me, "Bill, look. I'm convinced you've got the formula from these Oxford Group people to sober up drunks. But," he said, "When this thing hit you, you really were flat on your back; in fact, you read to me out of James' Varieties of Religious Experience how these transforming experiences come mostly to utterly hopeless people. Now Bill," he said, "Why don't you stop talking about that queer 'Hot Flash' of yours, it sounds much too nutty! Why don't you start at the other end of the line and soften up these drunks and pitch it into them real hard - how they have an obsession that condemns them to drink and an allergy of the body that condemns them to go mad or die. And if you feed them that dose, you may be able to soften them up - one drunk talking to another - at depth in such a way that they will then buy this other 'Stuff'! Why don't you try it that way around?"

Well, about that time (six months after my own experience and no success with the drunks) I go to Akron. Meanwhile though, we'd had great doings at Clinton Street with the outfit over there.

I remember one ^{little} amusing interlude. I wasn't there that night; I was out on some sort of a "Missionary Job". Along about one o'clock Lois heard a terrific crash in the front room where one of the drunks was sleeping; very drunk! (Sometimes all of them would be drunk at once and I guess this was one of the nights.) There was a most terrific crash out there and she jumped up, ran, turned on the light, and found that poor old Wes had fallen into the coal hod, but an immediate difficulty presented itself: Wes didn't have any clothes on. So, the fall into the coal hod, having made him aware of this, he said "Oh Lois, please pitch me a towel." So he garbed himself in a towel temporarily to get over the emergency, and then it fell out that he was in very very tough shape. And all that night Lois went from one doctor's house to another, up and down Clinton Street (the Harley Street of Brooklyn) trying to find a doctor who would respond. And she couldn't.

She dragged poor Wes through the streets, and he could only be kept revived by an occasional drink. She finally found a doctor in one of the hotels who responded because he himself was drunk! And poor Wes was still begging for one more drink. So while waiting for the doctor, Lois and Wes go into a bar and she bought him just one and Wes looked pleadingly at her and said "Well, after all Lois dear, how can a poor drunk fly on just one wing?" That was the kind of thing that went on endlessly at Clinton Street.

Meanwhile I get a chance to go to Akron on a business venture, and things start up out there. You know how Henrietta Seiberling brought Dr. Smith and me together; you know how I was tempted to drink; how I figured I needed a drunk just as much as he needed me; how that thing got going.

Well, last week was a time of very happy reminiscence about those days, and here is a little fragment of history which ran parallel with our early days here; the story of what took place in

Akron. And one of the principal figures in that story is a little nun of the Augustinian order, I believe and I think when the history of A.A. is one day put to paper she will emerge as our number one non-alcoholic heroine (leaving out Lois and Anne who of course, saw Smithy and me through it).

Last week I attended an anniversary celebration at Charity Hospital, Cleveland and it was the anniversary of the first year of the opening of a ward there. Actually there had been a ward there since 1940 and the early ward had come into being because in the fall of 1939 the Plaindealer of Cleveland had published a series of pieces about us in boxes, right in the middle of the editorial page every other day backed up by an editorial. In '39 the Cleveland group was maybe a score of people and when these pieces came along the newspaper began to retail to those twenty alcoholics hundreds upon hundreds of telephone calls. The community beleived that piece of publicity as no community ever has, before or since. The Plaindealer had said to the folks of Cleveland "Come and get it, it's good." And boy, how they came. Those twenty people were able to take - had to take on hundreds of cases in a matter of months. Drunks were tossed into hospitals willy-nilly. One alcoholic being visited would be literally hauled out of his bed, taken to one meeting and immediately he had to be turned loose on a fresh case. And it was there in Cleveland in late '39 and early '40 that we first proved that sobriety could be done on a mass production basis. That was Cleveland's great pioneering contribution.

Well, as I said, Charity Hospital had responded to that call, had maintained a ward of sorts all these years, but a year ago a very special ward was set up, and Sister Ignatia was brought here from Akron to take charge of it. And I attended this anniversary meeting and there were present about a thousand people, more than half of them people that Ignatia and Dr. Bob had got sober in Akron and it was a tremendous tribute of love to that dear little nun. How great the tribute was I can describe when I say that to fix up that battered old ward in Charity the alcoholics round about plumbers, carpenters, electricians, drunks with a little dough, had put in sixty thousand dollars worth of labor and materials to completely modernize that place which naturally includes a coffee bar and also a chapel. It was one of the greatest labors of love I have known any group of people in A.A. to make, and it was a tribute to this dear friend of ours, Sister Ignatia.

Cutting back to the early days in Akron, I can remember Dr. Bob telling me what a dickens of a time he had to interest hospitals in drunks out there. He tried the city hospital. He tried a couple of others. Briefly they would take us, but always we would have to yield to the people with broken legs and ailing gall bladders - you know, really sick folks! And in desperation, he remembered the Catholic hospital, St. Thomas where he sometimes operated. He remembered the shy and yet radiant little nun who had charge of admissions, so he went over to her and he stated his case. And very soon, this rare pair early in 1939 bootlegged a drunk into the place - nothing said to the board of trustees. They lodged the drunk in a two bed ward, and the drunk immediately set up a great protest because his disease was of such a confidential and private and delicate nature that he couldn't very well talk

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about it in the presence of the other occupant of the ward.

So, Sister Ignatia wheeled him out and put him in the flower room, and from there the drunk went out into the world to mend his ways and start life anew. He was the first one in early 1939.

Between that time and the time Dr. Bob died in 1950, those two had hospitalized five thousand cases of alcoholism, making Dr. Bob the prince of all twelve-steppers and, for our money, making Sister Ignatia a genuine saint.

No wonder, then, when the plumbing inspector looked over the work that the alcoholics had done to create the ward in Charity for Sister Ignatia - no wonder the plumbing inspector said "Gee, lady, this is no professional job, this came from the heart." And I know that if that plumbing inspector had been at that meeting in Charity last week, where sat a thousand of us and our wives and friends, he again would have exclaimed "This is no professional job, this comes from the heart."

So Lois and I, being here tonight, want to add our exclamation to that of the plumber: Gee, tonight is no professional job, it comes from the heart.