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WHERE DID THE BIG BOOK COME FROM?

What were the sources of the principles of the recovery program of Alcoholics Anonymous? Bill W. answered this question in an address delivered to the Medical Society of the State of New York on May 9, 1944.

"At the very outset we should like to make it ever so clear that A.A. is a synthetic concept - a synthetic gadget, as it were, drawing upon the resources of medicine, psychiatry, religion, and our own experience of drinking and recovery. You will search in vain for a single new fundamental. We have merely streamlined old and proved principles of psychiatry and religion into such forms that the alcoholic will accept them. And then we have created a society of his own kind where he can enthusiastically put these very principles to work on himself and other sufferers."

"Alcoholics Anonymous has made two major contributions to the program of psychiatry and religion. These are, it seems to us, the long missing links in the chain of recovery.

1. Our ability as ex-drinkers, to secure the confidence of the new man - to "build a transmission line into him."
2. The provision of an understanding society of ex-drinkers in which the newcomer can successfully apply the principles of medicine and religion to himself and others.

MAN, THE UNKNOWN

ALEXIS CARREL

Published in 1935, this 346 page volume was the turning point in determining what focus the Big Book should take.

Carrel's main point is that the world is full of specialists who can create things out of the elements above and below ground. But when it comes to man himself, very little is known.

Carrel claims that the mistake being made is that man is allowing himself to be governed by science when man is a natural being and is driven by instincts and must be governed by the laws of nature.

Bill W. in a talk given at the Yale Summer School of Alcohol Studies in June, 1945, stated.

"On reading that book some of us realized that was just what we had been groping toward. We had being to build a program out of our own experiences. At this point we thought, let's reach into other people's experiences. Let's go back to our friends the Doctors, let's go back to our friends the preachers, the social workers, all those who have been concerned with us, and again review what they have got and bring it into synthesis. And let us, where we can, bring them in where they will fit.

So our process of trial and error began and, at the end of four years, the material was cast in the form of a book known as Alcoholics Anonymous."

THE BIBLE

The early A.A.'s used the Bible and concentrated on the following two areas.

1 - 1 Corinthians 13. Paul listed the seven points of love and the eight points of what love is not. He also points out the contrast between gifts, perfection and love.

2 - The Book of James. The theme of The Book of James is Christianity in action and deals with a series of topics which were of great interest to the alcoholics. These topics are:

- 1:1-18 Trials and Temptations.
- 1:19-27 Listening and Doing.
- 2:1-13 Mercy and Judgement.
- 2:14-26 Faith and Works.
- 3:1-12 Taming the Tongue.
- 3:13-18 True and False Wisdom.
- 4:1-12 Friendship with God.
- 4:13-5:12 Investing in the Future.
- 5:13-20 Power of Prayer.

The phrase "Faith Without Works is Dead" is taken directly from the Book of James.

VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

WILLIAM JAMES

Published in 1902, this 526 page was read by Bill W. the day after his spiritual experience in Townes Hospital in order to understand what had happened to him.

Spiritual experiences, James thought could transform people. Some were sudden; others came on gradually. Some flowed out of religious channels; others did not. But nearly all had the great common denominators of pain, suffering, clamity. Complete hopelessness and deflation at depth were almost always required to make the person ready.

Bill W. reasoned that to have an experience or awakening-

- a- There had to be complete failure of the will in a certain part of one's life. With the alcoholic it was control of alcohol.
- b- There had to be an admission of failure.
- c- There must be a cry for help.

Thus, the A.A. procedure of telling one's story and stressing the progressive loss of control and the fatal malady consisting of the physical allergy and the mental obsession. When this is driven home the alcoholic will surrender to the problem and then is open to a solution.

AS A MAN THINKETH

JAMES ALLEN

Published in 1910, this 59 page volume was used by early A.A.'s to understand the principle of "CAUSE AND EFFECT"

Allen states; a man is literally what he thinks, his character being the complete sum of all his thoughts.

Man creates all of the circumstances of his life through thought and his environment is the reflection of these circumstances.

The mind must be treated as a garden and man must learn to identify and remove the weeds.

We must learn to crucify ourselves on a daily basis as daily living demands daily dying.

Thus, the core A.A. ideas that "we must get down to causes and conditions", "So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making." "That, "Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

HENRY DRUMMOND

Written in 1883 in a mission station in Africa, Drummond first delivered his lecture on LOVE at the Northfield Conferences, U.S.A.

This writing is an analysis of I Corinthians XIII, which is Paul's explanation that the greatest thing in the world is love.

Drummond describes the spectrum of love as having nine elements.

Patience - "Love suffereth long."

Kindness - "And is kind."

Generosity - "Love envieth not."

Humility - "Love vaunteth not itself, is not easily puffed up."

Courtesy - "Doth not behave itself unseemly."

Unselfishness - "Seeketh not her own."

Good Temper - "Is not easily provoked."

Guilelessness - "Thinketh no evil."

Sincerity - "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceeth in truth."

To these the early alcoholics added Gratitude and tolerance.

Gratitude - The willingness to repay for gifts received.

Tolerance - To allow the other guy his right to be wrong. To resist not evil and to understand that people do not behave poorly because they want to but because they have to.

The early members used to practice one of these elements each week and then discuss the results. This way they came to understand Steps 6 and 7.



SERMON ON THE MOUNT

EMMET FOX

Published in 1934, this 199 page volume was used by the early A.A.'s.

Fox explains that The Beatitudes are a prose poem in eight verses (Matthew V) which is complete in itself, and constitutes what is practically a general summary of the whole Christian teaching.

This book was of special interest as the Oxford Group had adopted four basic points: Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, Absolute Unselfishness and Absolute Love which were guides to our life in God.

Robert Speer had written The Principles of Jesus in 1902, in which he had distilled the Beatitudes into the Four Absolutes.

FOR SINNERS ONLY

A. J. RUSSELL

Published in 1932, this 347 page volume was considered as the basic text of the Oxford Groups.

The Oxford Groups described "SIN" as anything which blocks me off from God and my fellow man.

From this book Bill W. borrowed much of the writing on self and the function of self, Most of what is written in the Big Book on steps four, five and eight and nine came from this volume.

WHAT IS THE OXFORD GROUP?

By THE LAYMAN WITH A NOTEBOOK.

Published in 1933, this 132 page anonymous volume was considered as the basic text of the Oxford Group and its purpose was to explain the basic principles of the groups life changing program and the practical spiritual activities.

The Oxford Group has four basic points which are the keys to the kind of spiritual life God wishes us to lead.

The points are:

- Absolute Honesty.
- Absolute Purity.
- Absolute Unselfishness.
- Absolute Love.

To be spiritually reborn, and to live in the state in which these four points are the guides to our life in God, the Oxford Group advocates four practical spiritual activities:

1. The sharing of our sins and temptations with another Christian life given to God, and to use Sharing as Witness to help others, still unchanged, to recognize and acknowledge their sins.
2. Surrender of our life, past, present, and future, into God's keeping and direction.
3. Restitution to all whom we have wronged directly or indirectly.
4. Listening to, accepting, relying on God's Guidance and carrying it out in everything we do or say, great or small.

These spiritual activities have proved indispensable to countless numbers who are living Changed lives. They are not new ideas nor inventions of the Oxford Group. They are the simple tenets of simple Christianity.

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The Oxford Groups had many practices which A.A. borrowed and are traditional practices today.

- O.G. meetings opened with a moment of silence and closed with the Lord's Prayer.
- O.G. had open and closed meetings. Open meetings were sharing for witness and closed meetings sharing for confession.
- Each group had a business team which was responsible for the group's programme, set-up and clean-up.
- O.G. practiced anonymity.
- O.G. members celebrated the anniversary of their spiritual rebirth.
- O.G. organized round-ups and conventions.
- O.G. had the practice of sponsorship. Their motto was, "Walk with the new man until he becomes a life changer, then leave him alone as the needs of others will drive him back to God."

THE COMMON SENSE OF DRINKING

RICHARD R. PEABODY

Published in 1935, this 191 page volume was written by a recovered alcoholic who had recovered through the Emmanuel Movement in Boston. Peabody went on to become a lay therapist in New York City and had an office two blocks from the Calvary Mission where Bill W. was attending meetings of the Oxford Groups.

From this book Bill W. borrowed such phrases as "once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic," "half measures are of no avail," and the entire story of A MAN of Thirty contained in the chapter "More About Alcoholism."

TWICE BORN MEN

HAROLD BEGBIE

Published in 1909, this 280 page volume is a collection of "drunk stories" of men who recovered through spiritual experiences in England.

The stories have titles such as A Tight Handful, The Criminal, A Copper Basher, Lowest of the Low, Rags and Bones and Apparent Failure. The Big Book contains similar titles.

A WAY OF LIFE

WILLIAM OSLER

Published in 1937, this 41 page volume was used by early A.A.'s to understand the concept of living one day at a time.

This volume is an address delivered at Yale University in 1913, and contains a philosophy of life.

Osler states; "Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand."

"Our lives are like a great ocean liner. We must learn to walk through the compartments each day and check that the bulkheads are secure."

"The load of tomorrow added to that of yesterday, carried today, makes the strongest falter."

DAILY INSPIRATIONAL READINGS

Many members of Alcoholics Anonymous have adopted the practice of a daily inspirational reading. Over the years a series of books were published to fulfill this purpose.

On the table before you are five books which have been used by members over the years.

THE RUNNER'S BIBLE

By Nora Holm

Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913.

MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST

By Oswald Chambers

Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935.

GOD CALLING

By A.J. Russell

Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935 (Published in the U.S.A. in 1945)

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A DAY

By Richmond Walker

Hazelden, 1950.

God Calling was used as an outline for Richmond Walker as he wrote his book of daily inspirational readings for alcoholics. Walker offered his book to A.A. in 1950 for them to publish. After A.A. refused the offer on the basis that the book had a Christian slant, Pat Butler, representing The Hazelden Foundation acquired the rights to publish the book. This book has sold over four million copies to date.

DAILY REFLECTIONS

By A.A. Members

A.A.W.S., 1990.