

BILL WILSON

DR. JUNG, DR. SILKWORTH AND AA

On Saturday, October 7, 1967, Bill W., AA's co-founder, celebrated his thirty-third AA anniversary in company with more than 3,000 AAs who gathered in the main ballroom of the New York Hilton for the impressive occasion, sponsored each year by New York AA Intergroup. Bill was the third and final speaker of the evening. Jim S. of the Commack Group on Long Island, and Kirsten T. of the Scarsdale, N. Y., Group had spoken. Then Bill told his own story to an audience that listened raptly to his new insights into the stages whereby he was changed from a "hopeless drunk" to the man who, with the late Dr. Bob S. of Akron, was to found a mutual-aid society for recovery from alcoholism, with members today numbering a half-million in more than ninety countries.

As he told his story, Bill stressed the help that had come to him and to early AA--without which there would have been no Fellowship--from "spiritually centered, spiritually animated men and women." He singled out especially the contributions of Dr. Carl Jung of Zurich and Dr. William D. Silkworth of New York City, and he read to the thousands present a letter from Dr. Jung, (The letter is reprinted on page 20 of this issue.)

When Bill rose to talk on that Saturday night last October, this issue of the Grapevine was already planned. It was to include the reprint of Bill's correspondence with Dr. Jung you will find beginning on page 16. We made a last-minute decision, however, to alter the issue and publish, also, portions of Bill's anniversary talk, because of its particular relevance to the meaning and tremendous importance of Jung's initial "message to AA."

(Bill's own story is told in greater detail in the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, beginning on page 1, and in AA Comes of Age, beginning on page 51, Both books are available from AA's General Service Office, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, N. Y. 10017.)

Bill began by making references to the talks of Kirsten and Jim, who had preceded him on the podium. . . .

AS KIRSTEN said so poignantly just now, "The years laid waste by the locusts are over. . . ." And as Jim so simply remarked, "There is a God and there is a Grace. . . ."

Tonight I think I would like. . . to tell you my own story in terms, first, of the "years laid waste" and the reasons I now see why this was so--what in my early life contributed to my alcoholism--and, then, in terms of my belief that "there is a God and there is a Grace" and what the outcome has been for me and for so many because of that belief.

Our chairman tonight [Jim F. of White Plains, N. Y.] remarked on the wonderful friends that AA has had from the start. He might have said the wonderful friends we have had since before AA was even a gleam in the eye of any of us!

Long before I was sober, long before there was any idea that there would be this AA way for alcoholics to help themselves, certain men and women were gaining skills and insights that were to make all the difference to us in later years. The thing that characterized all of these early friends of ours who were to donate their skill and wisdom to us in AA was this: In each case where telling contributions were made, the man or woman was spiritually centered, spiritually animated.

Tonight I would like to sketch just one of the historical situations out of which our Fellowship sprang. Many of you have heard parts of the story before, the story of how Roland H., an American businessman, was getting progressively worse in alcoholism--undergoing one treatment, one so-called cure after another, with no result. Finally, as a refuge of last resort, he went to Europe and literally cast himself upon the care of a psychiatrist, Dr. Carl Jung, who was to prove, in the event, a great and good friend of AA.

You will recall Dr. Jung as one of the three first pioneers in the art of psychiatry. The thing that distinguished him from his colleagues, Freud and Adler, was the fact that he was spiritually animated--something that was to make all the difference to each and every one of us now here, and will make the difference for all yet to come. . . .[1]

I never realized what a very great man in spiritual dimensions Carl Jung was until, in 1961, I wrote him a very belated letter of gratitude for the part he had played in originating our Society of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This was the last year of Dr. Jung's life. He was old. Nevertheless, he sat down and wrote me a letter.[2] It looks like he tapped it out on a typewriter with one finger. It is one of my most cherished possessions. Lois framed it, and it will always be with us.

We ought to note very carefully what Dr. Jung said in that letter, so obviously written in profound love and understanding--in the language of the heart. His insight into what was needed for recovery from alcoholism, an insight that came to me through Roland and Ebby at a crucial point in my own deterioration, meant everything for AA when it was still in embryo. His humble willingness to speak the truth, even when it meant disclosing the limitations of his own art, gives the measure of the man.

There was another spiritually animated man, Dr. William D. Silkworth, whose contribution to AA paralleled Dr. Jung's. Unlike Jung, Dr. Silkworth was a man in obscure position, but he was spiritually centered--he had to be! He declared to all comers, after twenty years of almost absolute defeat in trying to help alcoholics, that he did love alcoholics and wanted to go on working with and for them. Every alcoholic who came his way felt that love. A very few recovered. He thought I might recover. Then the day came when it was clear that I would not, that I could not.

By this time Dr. Silkworth had defined alcoholism as a sickness of the emotions, coupled with a sickness of the body which he loosely described as an allergy. These words of his are to be seen in" the foreword of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, entitled, "The Doctor's Opinion," and over the intervening years they have been incorporated into the consensus that is AA.

As Jung had told Roland that his case was hopeless and that medicine and psychiatry could do nothing more for him, so Silkworth told Lois on a fateful day in the summer of 1934: "I am afraid that Bill will have to be committed. There is nothing that I can do for him, or anything else that I know." These were words of great humility from a professional.

They scared me into sobriety for two months, although I soon resumed my drinking. But the message that Ebby had brought me from Dr. Jung and from the Oxford Groups, and the sentence that Dr. Silkworth pronounced over me continued to occupy my mind in every waking hour thereafter. I began to be very resentful. Here was Dr. Silkworth, who had defined alcoholism--the obsession that condemns you to drink against your will and true interests, even unto destruction, and the bodily sensitivity that guarantees madness and death if you drink at all. And here came Dr. Jung via Roland and Ebby confirming that there was no way out known to the doctors. My god, Science, the only god I had then, had declared me hopeless.

But Ebby had also brought hope. Not much later, I was back in the hospital, in Dr. Silkworth's care after what proved to be my last drunk. Ebby came to visit me again. I asked him to repeat once more what he had said over my kitchen table in Brooklyn that first time he told me how he had gotten sober.

"Well," he said, "you know, you get honest with yourself; you make a self-survey; you talk it out with the other guy; you quit living alone and begin to get straight with the world around by making restitution; you try the kind of giving that demands no reward either in approval, prestige, or money; and you ask whatever Higher Power there is, even if it is just as an experiment, to help you find the Grace to be released from alcoholism."

As Ebby put it, it was quite simple, quite matter-of-fact, and said with a smile. But this was it.

So Ebby finally took his leave. Now the jaws of the dilemma really crushed. I hit an all-time block. I can only suppose that any particle of belief that there was a single thing I could do for myself alone was for the moment rubbed out. And I found myself as a child, utterly alone in complete darkness. And I cried out as a child, expecting little--indeed, expecting nothing. I simply said, "If there is a God, will He show Himself?" Then I was granted one of those instantaneous illuminations. The sort of thing that really defies description. I was seized with great joy and ecstasy beyond all possible expression. In the mind's eye, it seemed to me I stood on a high mountain. I was taken there, I had not climbed it. And then the great thought burst upon me: "Bill, you are a free man! This is the God of the Scriptures." And then I was filled with a consciousness of a Presence. A great peace fell over me, and I was with this I don't know how long.

But then the dark side put in an appearance, and it said to me, "Perhaps, Bill, you are hallucinating. You better call in the doctor."

So the doctor came, and haltingly I told him of the experience. Then came great words for Alcoholics Anonymous. The little man had listened, looking at me so benignly with those blue eyes of his, and at length he said to me, "Bill, you are not crazy, I have read about this sort of thing in the books but I have never seen it firsthand. I don't know what it is you have, Bill, but it must be some great psychic event, and you had better hang on to it--it is so much better than what you had only an hour ago."

So I hung on, and then I knew there was a God and I knew there was a Grace. And through it all, I have continued to feel, if I may presume to say it, that I do know these things.

Then, of course, being trained as an analyst of sorts, I began to ask myself why this had happened to me. And why had it so seldom hap-

pened to drunks before? Why shouldn't this be the heritage of any drunk? And while I was wondering, Ebby came again the next day and he had in his hands a message from another great man, William James, and the message came to me in a book called Varieties of Religious Experience. I read the book cover to cover, and naturally I found experiences corresponding with my own. I found other experiences, however, that were very gradual. I found experiences that occurred outside of any religious association.

But nearly all of these experiences that were capable of transforming motivations had common denominators over and above any explanation by associations, or common discipline, or faith, or what have you. These gifts of Grace, whether they came in a rush or very gradually, were all founded on a basis of hopelessness. The recipients were people who in some controlling area of life found themselves in a situation that could not be gotten over, around, or under. Their defeat had been absolute, and so was mine.

Then I wondered about that defeat, and I realized what a part my god of Science, as personified by Dr. Carl Jung and Dr. Silkworth, had played in it. They had transmitted to me the very bad news that the chance of recovery on my own unaided resources or merely by medication was just about nil. This was deflation at depth--this made me ready for the gift when it came.

Now, actually, although this is the great experience of my life, I do not think it in any way superior or in its essentials very different at all than the experience which all AAs have had--the transforming experience--the spiritual awakening. They are all from the same source: the divine peace.

So, with my own experience had come the possibility of a chain reaction. I realized nothing had happened to me until certain messages had been transmitted, striking into me at great depth, by another alcoholic. Therefore, the thought came of one alcoholic talking to another just as Oxford Group people were talking to each other--in the language of the heart. Maybe this could be the transmission belt. So I started working among alcoholics.

I went to a few Oxford Group meetings and to the missions. Dr. Silkworth let me work with a few people in the hospital at the risk of his reputation. And lo and behold! Nothing happened. Because--some of my old grandeur had come back. I had thought my experience was something very special. The old ego began to boom again. I was actually heard to say that I was destined to fix all the drunks in the world--quite a large order.

Naturally nothing happened until--again--the deflation came. It came on that day when, in the Mayflower Hotel in Akron, I was tempted to take a drink for the first time since my hospital experience. That was when I first realized that I would need other alcoholics to preserve myself and maintain that original gift of sobriety. It was not just a case of trying to help alcoholics. If my own sobriety were to be maintained, I had to find another alcoholic to work with. So when Dr. Bob and I sat down for the first time face-to-face, it was a very different act. I said, "Bob, I am speaking because I need you as much as you could possibly need me. I am in danger of slipping back down the drain."

So there is the story. There is the nature of the illness as explained by Dr. Jung and Dr. Silkworth--and there is one drunk talking to another, telling his story of recovery through reliance on the Grace of God.

^{1*}At this point Sill told of Roland's contact with Jung, and the message Roland carried to Ebby, which Ebby in turn brought to Bill, a story summarized in Bill's letter on page 16 of this issue.

Bill W.