

Here is an “annotated” portion of
“Alcoholics Anonymous: *The Story of* How Many Thousands of
Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism”

Chapter Two - THERE IS A SOLUTION
(Pages 17 – 29)

17:1 We, of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, know thousands of men and women who were once just as hopeless as Bill. Nearly all have recovered. They have solved the drink problem.

17:2 We are average Americans. All sections of this country and many of its occupations are represented, as well as many political, economic, social, and religious backgrounds. **We are people who normally would not mix. But there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful.** We are like the passengers of a great liner the moment after rescue from shipwreck when camaraderie [comradeship], joyousness and democracy pervade the vessel from steerage [where the poor people traveled] to Captain's table [where the high class people dined]. **Unlike the feelings of the ship's passengers, however, our joy in escape from disaster does not subside [or decrease] as we go our individual ways.** The feeling of having shared in a common peril is one element in the powerful cement which binds us. But that in itself would never have held us together as we are now joined.

17:3 **The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action.** This is the great news this book carries to those who suffer from alcoholism.

18:1 An illness of this sort - and we have come to believe it an illness - involves those about us in a way no other human sickness can. If a person has cancer all are sorry for him and no one is angry or hurt. But not so with the alcoholic illness, for with it there goes annihilation [the destruction] of all the things worth while in life [This means that alcoholism reduces everything worthwhile in life to nothingness]. It engulfs [it overwhelms] all whose lives touch the sufferer's. It brings misunderstanding, fierce resentment, financial insecurity, disgusted friends and employers, warped lives of blameless children, sad wives and parents - anyone can increase the list.

18:2 We hope this volume will inform and comfort those who are, or who may be affected. There are many.

18:3 Highly competent psychiatrists who have dealt with us have found it sometimes impossible to persuade an alcoholic to discuss his situation without reserve. Strangely enough, wives, parents and intimate friends usually find us even more unapproachable than do the psychiatrist and the doctor.

18:4

But the ex-problem drinker who has found this solution, who is properly armed with facts about himself, can generally win the entire confidence of another alcoholic in a few hours. Until such an understanding is reached, little or nothing can be accomplished.

[This paragraph nicely describes the characteristics of an A.A. sponsor:]

18:5 That the man who is making the approach has had the same difficulty, that he obviously knows what he is talking about, that his whole deportment [his behavior] shouts at the new prospect that he is a man with a real answer, that he has no attitude of Holier Than Thou, nothing

whatever except the sincere desire to be helpful; that there are no fees to pay, no axes to grind [no selfish purposes], no people to please, no lectures to be endured - these are the conditions

19:0 we have found most effective. After such an approach many take up their beds and walk again. [This means they recover from alcoholism. The book goes on...]

19:1 None of us makes a sole vocation of this work [that is, we don't make a living doing this work], nor do we think its effectiveness would be increased if we did. **We feel that elimination of our drinking is but a beginning. A much more important demonstration of our principles lies before us in our respective homes, occupations and affairs.** All of us spend much of our spare time in the sort of effort which we are going to describe. A few are fortunate enough to be so situated that they can give nearly all their time to the work.

19:2 If we keep on the way we are going there is little doubt that much good will result, but the surface of the problem would hardly be scratched. Those of us who live in large cities are overcome by the reflection that close by hundreds are dropping into oblivion every day. Many could recover if they had the opportunity we have enjoyed. How then shall we present that which has been so freely given us?

19:3 We have concluded to publish an anonymous volume setting forth the problem as we see it. We shall bring to the task our combined experience and knowledge. This should suggest a useful program for anyone concerned with a drinking problem.

19:4 Of necessity there will have to be discussion of matters medical, psychiatric, social, and religious. We are aware that these matters are, from their very nature, controversial. Nothing would please us so much as to write a book which would contain no basis for contention [disagreement] or argument. We shall do our utmost to achieve that ideal. Most of us sense that real tolerance of other people's shortcomings and viewpoints and a respect for their opinions are attitudes which make us

20:0 more useful to others. Our very lives, as ex-problem drinkers, depend upon our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs.

20:1 You may already have asked yourself why it is that all of us became so very ill from drinking. Doubtless you are curious to discover how and why, in the face of expert opinion to the contrary, we have recovered from a hopeless condition of mind and body. If you are an alcoholic who wants to get over it, you may already be asking - "What do I have to do?"

20:2 It is the purpose of this book to answer such questions specifically. We shall tell you what we have done. Before going into a detailed discussion, it may be well to summarize some points as we see them.

20:3 How many times people have said to us: "I can take it or leave it alone. Why can't he?" "Why don't you drink like a gentleman or quit?" "That fellow can't handle his liquor." "Why don't you try beer and wine?" "Lay off the hard stuff." "His will power must be weak." "He could stop if he wanted to." "She's such a sweet girl, I should think he'd stop for her sake." "The doctor told him that if he ever drank again it would kill him, but there he is all lit up again."

20:4 Now these are commonplace [ordinary] observations on [or comments about] drinkers which we hear all the time. Back of them is a world of ignorance and misunderstanding. **We see that these expressions refer to people whose reactions are very different from ours.**

20:5 **Moderate drinkers** have little trouble in giving up liquor entirely if they have good reason for it. They can take it or leave it alone.

20:6 Then we have a certain type of **hard drinker**. He may have the habit badly enough to gradually impair

21:0 him physically and mentally. It may cause him to die a few years before his time. If a sufficiently strong reason - ill health, falling in love, change of environment, or the warning of a doctor - becomes operative, this man can also stop or moderate, although he may find it difficult and troublesome and may even need medical attention.

21:1 But what about the real alcoholic? He may start off as a moderate drinker; he may or may not become a continuous hard drinker; but **at some stage of his drinking career he begins to lose all control of his liquor consumption, once he starts to drink.**

21:2 Here is the fellow who has been puzzling you, especially in his lack of control. He does absurd, incredible, tragic things while drinking. He is a real Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde [he becomes two different people-like night and day]. He is seldom mildly intoxicated. He is always more or less insanely drunk. His disposition [his thinking and behavior] while drinking resembles his normal nature but little. He may be one of the finest fellows in the world. Yet let him drink for a day, and he frequently becomes disgustingly, and even dangerously anti-social. He has a positive genius for getting tight [drunk] at exactly the wrong moment, particularly when some important decision must be made or engagement kept. He is often perfectly sensible and well balanced concerning everything except liquor, but in that respect he is incredibly dishonest and selfish. He often possesses special abilities, skills, and aptitudes, and has a promising career ahead of him. He uses his gifts to build up a bright outlook for his family and himself, and then pulls the structure down on his head by a senseless series of sprees [or binges]. He is the fellow who goes to bed so intoxicated he ought to sleep the clock around. Yet early next

22:0 morning he searches madly for the bottle he misplaced the night before. If he can afford it, he may have liquor concealed all over his house to be certain no one gets his entire supply away from him to throw down the wastepipe [the sewer]. As matters grow worse, he begins to use a combination of high-powered sedative and liquor to quiet his nerves so he can go to work. Then comes the day when he simply cannot make it and gets drunk all over again. Perhaps he goes to a doctor who gives him morphine or some sedative with which to taper off. Then he begins to appear at hospitals and sanitariums [detox and treatment centers].

22:1 This is by no means a comprehensive [or complete] picture of the true alcoholic, as our behavior patterns vary. But this description should identify him roughly.

22:2 Why does he behave like this? If hundreds of experiences have shown him that one drink means another debacle [another disaster] with all its attendant suffering and humiliation, why is it he takes that one drink? Why can't he stay on the water wagon [-why can't he stay sober]? What has become of the common sense and will power that he still sometimes displays with respect to other matters?

22:3 Perhaps there never will be a full answer to these questions. **Opinions vary considerably as to why the alcoholic reacts differently from normal people. We are not sure why, once a certain point is reached, little can be done for him. We cannot answer the riddle.**

22:4 **We know that while the alcoholic keeps away from drink, as he may do for months or years, he reacts much like other men. We are equally positive that once he takes any alcohol whatever into his system, something happens, both in the bodily and mental sense, which makes it virtually impossible for him to**

23:0 **stop. The experience of any alcoholic will abundantly confirm this.**

23:1 These observations would be academic [or theoretial] and pointless if our friend never took the first drink, thereby setting the terrible cycle in motion. Therefore, the main problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind, rather than in his body. If you ask him why he started on that last bender [or binge], the chances are he will offer you any one of a hundred alibis. Sometimes these excuses have a certain plausibility [or reasonableness], but none of them really makes sense in the light of the havoc an alcoholic's drinking bout creates. They sound like the philosophy of the man who, having a headache, beats himself on the head with a hammer so that he can't feel the ache. If you draw this fallacious [erroneous and misleading] reasoning to the attention of an alcoholic, he will laugh it off, or become irritated and refuse to talk.

23:2 Once in a while he may tell the truth. And **the truth, strange to say, is usually that he has no more idea why he took that first drink than you have.** Some drinkers have excuses with which they are satisfied part of the time. But in their hearts **they really do not know why they do it.** Once this malady has a real hold, they are a baffled lot [of confused people]. There is the obsession that somehow, someday, they will beat the game. But they often suspect they are down for the count [defeated]. [Note: **this is the first place the word "obsession" appears in the book.** An obsession is a compulsive, often unreasonable idea or feeling. It is a major element in the disease concept of alcoholism, a disease of both the body and the mind. The allergic reaction of the body produces a craving for more and more alcohol while the obsession of the mind drives the alcoholic to drink once again (and again and again), despite the consequences. The book goes on...]

23:3 How true this is, few realize. In a vague way their families and friends sense that these drinkers are abnormal, but everybody hopefully awaits the day when the sufferer will rouse [or wake] himself from his lethargy [his drowsiness] and assert his power of will.

23:4 The tragic truth is that if the man be a real alcoholic, the happy day may not arrive. He has lost

24:0 control. **At a certain point in the drinking of every alcoholic, he passes into a state where the most powerful desire to stop drinking is of absolutely no avail [useless] This tragic situation has already arrived in practically every case long before it is suspected.**

24:1 The fact is that **most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink.** Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent. **We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness [awareness] with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink.**

24:2 The almost certain consequences that follow taking even a glass of beer do not crowd into the mind to deter us. If these thoughts occur, they are hazy and readily supplanted with the old threadbare [worn out] idea that this time we shall handle ourselves like other people. There is a complete failure of the kind of defense that keeps one from putting his hand on a hot stove.

24:3 The alcoholic may say to himself in the most casual way, "It won't burn me this time, so here's how!" Or perhaps he doesn't think at all. How often have some of us begun to drink in this nonchalant way [without concern], and after the third or fourth, pounded on the bar and said to ourselves, "For God's sake, how did I ever get started again?" Only to have that thought supplanted by "Well, I'll stop with the sixth drink." Or "What's the use anyhow?"

24:4 **When this sort of thinking is fully established in an individual with alcoholic tendencies, he has probably placed himself beyond human aid, and unless locked up, may die or go permanently insane.** These stark and ugly facts have been confirmed by legions [thousands] of alcoholics

25:0 throughout history. But for the grace of God, there would have been thousands more convincing demonstrations. So many want to stop but cannot.

25:1 There is a solution. Almost none of us liked the self-searching, the leveling of our pride, the confession of shortcomings which the process requires for its successful consummation [or completion]. But we saw that it really worked in others, and we had come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life as we had been living it. When, therefore, we were approached by those in whom the problem had been solved, **there was nothing left for us** but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet. We have found much of heaven and we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence of which we had not even dreamed [the fourth dimension is something outside ordinary experience].

[Spiritual tools relate to the soul, spirit, mind and emotions, not material or physical things.]

25:2 The great fact is just this, and nothing less: That we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows and toward God's universe. The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous [this means the experience is amazing -- totally unexpected, extraordinary, and marvelous]. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves.

25:3 If you are as seriously alcoholic as we were, **we believe there is no middle-of-the-road solution** . [This means we can't take a course of action or adopt a point of view that is midway between two extremes – for real alcoholics, the 12-step program of recovery is an all-or-nothing deal, producing either in complete success or total failure, with no possibility of anything in between.] We were in a position where life was becoming impossible, and if we had passed into the region from which there is no return through human aid, **we had but two alternatives:** One was to **go on to the bitter end**, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation as best we could; and the other, **to accept spiritual help**. This

26:0 we did because we honestly wanted to, and were willing to make the effort.

26:1 A certain American business man [Rowland Hazard] had ability, good sense, and high character. For years he had floundered from one sanitarium [one hospital, one treatment center] to another. He had consulted the best known American psychiatrists. Then he had gone to Europe [hoping to have Dr. Sigmund Freud treat him, but Freud wasn't available. The book says... Then he had gone to Europe], placing himself in the care of a celebrated physician (the psychiatrist, Dr. Jung) who prescribed for him. [Dr. Jung treated Rowland for a year in 1930-31. The word "prescribe" means to recommend a particular course of action or treatment as a remedy for something. The book goes on...] **Though experience [with American psychiatrists] had made him skeptical [because they were unable to help him], he finished his treatment with unusual confidence. His physical and mental condition were unusually good. Above all, he believed he had acquired such a profound knowledge of the inner workings of his mind and its hidden springs that relapse was unthinkable.** [The word relapse means to fall or slide back into a former state.] Nevertheless, [soon after he left Dr. Jung's care] he was drunk in

a short time. More baffling still, he could give himself **no satisfactory explanation for his fall.** [He couldn't understand why he relapsed – he was one of the baffled lot described on p. 23.]

26:2 So he returned to this doctor, whom he admired, and asked him point-blank why he could not recover. He wished above all things to regain self-control. He seemed quite rational and well-balanced with respect to other problems. Yet he had no control whatever over alcohol. Why was this?

26:3 **He begged the doctor to tell him the whole truth, and he got it. In the doctor's judgment he was utterly hopeless;** he could never regain his position in society and he would have to place himself under lock and key or hire a bodyguard [to stop him from drinking] if he expected to live long. That was a great physician's opinion.

26:4 But [in 1939, eight years later] this man still lives, and is a free man. He does not need a bodyguard nor is he confined. He can go anywhere on this earth where other free men may go

27:0 without disaster, provided he remains willing to maintain a certain simple attitude.

27:1 Some of our alcoholic readers may think they can do without spiritual help. Let us tell you the rest of the conversation our friend had with his doctor.

27:2 The doctor said: **"You have the mind of a chronic alcoholic. I have never seen one single case recover, where that state of mind existed to the extent that it does in you."** Our friend felt as though the gates of hell had closed on him with a clang.

27:3 He said to the doctor, **"Is there no exception?"**

27:4 **"Yes,"** replied the doctor, "there is. Exceptions to cases such as yours have been occurring since early times. **Here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences. To me these occurrences are phenomena.** [That means vital spiritual experiences are out of the ordinary, observable, and not fully understood, but they do cause chronic alcoholics to recover from their troubled state of mind. Dr. Jung goes on to describe the essential characteristics of vital spiritual experiences:] **They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements.** [In psychology, the word "displacement", means a psychological defense mechanism in which there is an unconscious shift of emotions, affect--apparent mood, or desires from the original object to a more acceptable or immediate substitute. Dr. Jung said...]

Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side [thrown away], and a completely new set of conceptions [or ideas] and motives begin to dominate them. In fact, I have been trying to produce some such emotional rearrangement within you. With many individuals the methods which I employed are successful, but I have never been successful with an alcoholic of your description."

[Note: In psychiatry, emotional displacements involve the substitution of one response or piece of behavior for another. Dr. Jung said that, for chronic alcoholics, psychiatry was not able to produce the psychic change needed to produce a recovery from alcoholism.]

27:5 Upon hearing this, our friend was somewhat relieved, for he reflected that, after all, he was a good church member. **This hope, however, was destroyed by the doctor's telling him that while his religious convictions [his firm religious beliefs] were very good, in his case they did not spell the necessary vital spiritual experience.**

28:1 Here was the terrible dilemma in which our friend found himself when he had the extraordinary experience, which as we have already told you, made him a free man. [Rowland

Hazard left the care of Dr. Jung with a new mission; to find a way to have a vital spiritual experience. Science and medicine could not and have not yet found a way to accomplish this, but Rowland found a solution. He passed it on to Ebby Thatcher and Ebby passed it on to Bill Wilson in Bill's Story – on pages 12 & 13 of Chapter 1. Rowland remained sober until he died in 1945.]

28:2 **We, in our turn, sought the same escape with all the desperation of drowning men.** [How intensely does a drowning man look for a solution? Does he use a middle-of-the-road, moderate approach to solve his problem?] What seemed at first a flimsy reed, has proved to be the loving and powerful hand of God. **A new life has been given us or, if you prefer, "a design for living "[a way of life] that really works.**

28:3 **The distinguished American psychologist, William James, in his book " Varieties of Religious Experience", indicates a multitude of ways [or many ways] in which men have discovered God. We have no desire to convince anyone that there is only one way by which faith can be acquired.** If what we have learned and felt and seen means anything at all, it means that **all of us, whatever our race, creed, or color are the children of a living Creator with whom we may form a relationship upon simple and understandable terms as soon as we are willing and honest enough to try.** Those having religious affiliations will find here nothing disturbing to their beliefs or ceremonies. There is no friction among us over such matters.

28:4 **We think it no concern of ours what religious bodies our members identify themselves with as individuals.** [This means AAs have no reason or need to care about which church, faith, or creed others prefer.] **This should be an entirely personal affair** which each one decides for himself in the light of past associations, or his present choice. Not all of us join religious bodies [or groups], but most of us favor such memberships.

28:5 In the following chapter, there appears an explanation of alcoholism, as we understand it, then a chapter addressed to the **agnostic** [Note: the definition below ¹] Many who once were in this class are now among our members. [The word agnostic comes from two words – the “a” means without and “gnostic” means knowledge. Therefore, an agnostic is “one without knowledge”. Some agnostics believe God has not fully revealed himself to man because man’s mind cannot comprehend God. Other agnostics have different beliefs.] Surprisingly

29:0 enough, we find such convictions no great obstacle to a spiritual experience.

¹ Agnostic: one without knowledge. Definition: ag-nos-tic (ăg-nŏstĭk) Noun: 1.a. One who believes that it is impossible to know whether there is a God. 1.b. One who is skeptical about the existence of God but does not profess true atheism. 2. One who is doubtful or noncommittal about something. Adjective: 1. Relating to or being an agnostic. 2. Doubtful or noncommittal:

Word History: **An agnostic does not deny the existence of God and heaven but holds that one cannot know for certain whether or not they exist.** The term agnostic was fittingly coined by the 19th-century British scientist Thomas H. Huxley, who believed that only material phenomena were objects of exact knowledge. He made up the word from the prefix a-, meaning "without, not," as in amoral, and the noun “Gnostic”. Gnostic is related to the Greek word **gnōsis, "knowledge,"** which was used by early Christian writers to mean "higher, esoteric knowledge of spiritual things"; hence, Gnostic referred to those with such knowledge. In coining the term agnostic, Huxley was considering as "Gnostics" a group of his fellow intellectuals—"ists," as he called them—who had eagerly embraced various doctrines or theories that explained the world to their satisfaction. Because he was a "man without a rag of a label to cover himself with," Huxley coined the term agnostic for himself, its first published use being in 1870.

29:1 Further on, [in the book] **clear-cut directions are given showing how we recovered.**

These are followed by forty-three personal experiences.

29:2 Each individual, in the personal stories, describes in his own language and from his own point of view the way he established his relationship with God. These give a fair cross section of our membership and a clear-cut idea of what has actually happened in their lives.

29:3 We hope no one will consider these self-revealing accounts in bad taste. Our hope is that many alcoholic men and women, desperately in need, will see these pages, and we believe that it is only by fully disclosing ourselves and our problems that they will be persuaded to say, "Yes, I am one of them too; I must have this thing [this solution]."