

Here is an “annotated” portion of the book Alcoholics Anonymous: *The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*, Fourth Edition. New York City, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. 2001

FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

This is the Foreword as it appeared in the first printing of the first edition in 1939 [The Forward begins on Page xxii in the 4th Edition and on Page xiii in the 3rd Edition.]

xii:1 WE, OF Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book. For them, we hope these pages will prove so convincing that no further authentication will be necessary. We think this account of our experiences will help everyone to better understand the alcoholic. **Many do not comprehend that the alcoholic is a very sick person. And besides, we are sure that our way of living has its advantages for all.**

xii:2 It is important that we remain anonymous [that is, nameless, or unidentified] **because we are too few, at present to handle the overwhelming number of personal appeals which may result from this publication.** Being mostly business or professional folk, **we could not well carry on our occupations** in such an event. We would like it understood that **our alcoholic work is an avocation.** [An avocation is activity done in addition to one's regular work or profession, usually for enjoyment. An avocation is a hobby, a sideline, not a career. The book goes on...]

xii:3 When writing or speaking publicly about alcoholism, we urge each of our Fellowship to omit his personal name, designating himself instead as “a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

xii:4 Very earnestly we ask the press also, to observe this request, for otherwise we shall be greatly handicapped.

xii:5 We are not an organization in the conventional

xiv:0 sense of the word. There are no fees or dues whatsoever. The only requirement for membership is an honest desire to stop drinking. We are not allied with any particular faith, sect or denomination [that is, a society of collection of individuals called by the same name], nor do we oppose anyone. We simply wish to be helpful to those who are afflicted.

xiv:1 We shall be interested to hear from those who are getting results from this book, particularly from those who have commenced [or begun] work with other alcoholics. We should like to be helpful to such cases.

xiv:2 Inquiry by scientific, medical, and religious societies will be welcomed.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

The reasons for anonymity – not disclosing identities – in this Foreword to the First Edition are (1.) the many inquiries produced by this book are likely to overwhelm the 100 authors of this book; (2.) the authors wouldn't have time to earn a living if needy alcoholics overwhelmed them; and (3.) A.A. Service, the 3rd Legacy – Carrying The Message – is an avocation, not a vocation or profession.

THE DOCTOR'S OPINION

[Here, the word “opinion” means a belief or conclusion, a judgment based on special knowledge and given by an expert. These pages present an expert’s medical opinion.]

[The text begins on Page XXV in the 4th Edition, Page XIII in the 3rd Edition]

xxv:1 WE OF Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the reader will be interested in the medical estimate [an assessment] of the plan of recovery described in this book. **Convincing testimony must surely come from medical men who have had experience with the sufferings of our members and have witnessed our return to health. A well-known doctor, chief physician at a nationally prominent hospital specializing in alcoholic and drug addiction, gave Alcoholics Anonymous this letter:**

To Whom It May Concern:

xxv:3 I have specialized in the treatment of alcoholism for many years.

xxv:4 In late 1934 I attended a patient who, though he had been a competent businessman of good earning capacity, was an alcoholic of a type I had come to regard as hopeless.

xxv:5 In the course of his third treatment he acquired certain ideas concerning a possible means of recovery. As part of his rehabilitation [when he was returning to good health] he commenced to present his conceptions [his ideas] to other alcoholics, impressing upon them [he was urging them] that they must do likewise with still others. This has become the basis of a rapidly growing fellowship of these men and their families. **This man and over one hundred others appear to have recovered.**

xxv:6 I personally know scores of cases who were of the type with whom other methods had failed completely.

xxv:7 These facts appear to be of extreme medical importance; because of the extraordinary possibilities of rapid

xvi:0 growth inherent in this group they may mark a new epoch [a new era or new age] in the annals [that is, the records or journals] of alcoholism. These men may well have a remedy for thousands of such situations.

xvi:1 You may rely absolutely on anything they say about themselves. {Strong language!}

Very truly yours,

William D. Silkworth, M.D.

xvi:2 The physician who, at our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement **he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture must believe-that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind.** It did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight [running away from] from reality, or were outright mental defectives. These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But **we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, any picture of the alcoholic which leaves out this physical factor is incomplete.**

xvi:3 The doctor's theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us. [The following pages present this in more detail. The book goes on...] As laymen, our opinion as to its soundness [its reliability] may, of course, mean little. But as ex-problem drinkers, we can say that **his explanation makes good sense.** It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account.

xvi:4 Though we work out our solution on the spiritual as well as an altruistic [or unselfish] plane, we favor hospitalization for the alcoholic who is very jittery or befogged. More often than

not, it is imperative [important] that a man's brain be cleared before he is approached, as he has then a bet-

xxvii:0 ter chance of understanding and accepting what we have to offer. [A spiritual solution relates to the soul, spirit, mind and emotions, not material or physical things.]

The doctor writes:

xxvii:1 **The subject presented in this book seems to me to be of paramount [or greatest] importance to those afflicted with alcoholic addiction.**

xxvii :2 I say this after many years' experience as Medical Director of one of the oldest hospitals in the country treating alcoholic and drug addiction.

xxvii:3 There was, therefore, a sense of real satisfaction when I was asked to contribute a few words on a subject which is covered in such masterly detail in these pages.

xxvii :4 We doctors have realized for a long time that **some form of moral psychology was of urgent importance to alcoholics, but its application presented difficulties beyond our conception.** [This means the process of changing the behaviors and thinking of alcoholics was not well understood in 1939. The book goes on...] What with our ultra-modern standards, our scientific approach to everything, **we are perhaps not well equipped to apply the powers of good that lie outside our synthetic knowledge.** [Synthetic knowledge is the knowledge that men have discovered—so far. The doctor says we are poorly equipped to apply powers of good that are beyond our understanding. The book goes on...]

xxvii:5 Many years ago one of the leading contributors to this book came under our care in this hospital and while here he acquired some ideas which he put into practical application at once.

xxvii:6 Later, **he requested the privilege of being allowed to tell his story to other patients here and with some misgiving [some reluctance], we consented. The cases we have followed through have been most interesting; in fact, many of them are amazing. The unselfishness of these men as we have come to know them, the entire absence of profit motive, and their community spirit, is indeed inspiring** to one who has labored long and wearily in this alcoholic field. **They believe in themselves, and still more in the Power which pulls chronic [long-term] alcoholics back from the gates of death.**

xxvii:7 Of course an alcoholic ought to be freed from his physical

xxviii:0 craving for liquor, and this often requires a definite hospital procedure, before psychological measures can be of maximum benefit.

xxviii: We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation [a sign] of an allergy [an allergy is an unusual reaction to some substance. The book goes on to make it clear]; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate [moderate, or self-controlled] drinker. [It helps to know that a phenomenon is something that can be seen – observed, but though is it observable, it is poorly understood. The book goes on...] **These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all; and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their self-confidence, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve.**

xxviii: Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices. [That means emotional appeals to “stop drinking” simply do not work. The book goes on...] **The message which can interest and hold these alcoholic people must have depth and weight** [the solution involves a message that

is heavy and deep]. **In nearly all cases, their ideals must be grounded in a power greater than themselves, if they are to re-create their lives.**

xxviii: If any feel that as psychiatrists directing a hospital for alcoholics we appear somewhat sentimental, let them stand with us a while on the firing line, see the tragedies, the despairing wives, the little children; let the solving of these problems become a part of their daily work, and even of their sleeping moments, and the most cynical [those with an attitude of scornful distrust] will not wonder that we have accepted and encouraged this movement. **We feel, after many years of experience, that we have found nothing which has contributed more to the rehabilitation of these men than the altruistic movement now growing up among them.**

[Note: An altruistic movement is an organized effort by supporters of a common goal and, in this case, the goal is altruistic; that means it involves unselfish concern for the welfare of others; it's organized selflessness or unselfishness. It's the opposite of individual selfishness. The book goes on...]

xxviii: **Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol.** The sensation is so elusive [here, "elusive" means difficult to describe or define. The book says "the sensation is so elusive] that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate [or tell apart] the true from the false. **To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are [or, when sober, become] restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience**

Page xxvix:0 **the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks—drinks which they see others taking with impunity.** [Impunity means to do something without punishment, penalty, or harm.] After they have succumbed [or given in] to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree [a binge], emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. **This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery.** [Now let's pause just a moment...the term *Psychic* means something relating to mental processes. Doctor Silkworth says without a **complete psychic change, there is little hope of recovery from alcoholism. That's very important to understand.**]

Optional: [Now, to help us understand that elusive sense of "ease and comfort", or a "psychic change" that Doctor Silkworth mentions, let's jump ahead in the book to a section called "The Promises" or "The 9th Step Promises" on page 83...Please turn to page 83 and look at the bottom paragraph, the 4th paragraph - 83:4 - where it says "If we are painstaking about our phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through." **Many alcoholics say that these statements also become true when they change these sentences by adding the phrase "When I had a few drinks..."** now, consider this as you read "the promises" on page 83:

1. When I had a few drinks, I would be amazed before I was half way through.
2. When I had a few drinks, I would know a new freedom and a new happiness.
3. When I had a few drinks, I would not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.
4. When I had a few drinks, I would comprehend the word serenity and I would know peace.
5. When I had a few drinks, no matter how far down the scale I had gone, I would see how my experience could benefit others.
6. When I had a few drinks, that feeling of uselessness and self-pity would disappear.
7. When I had a few drinks, I would lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in my fellows.

8. When I had a few drinks, Self-seeking would slip away.
9. When I had a few drinks, my whole attitude and outlook upon life would change.
10. When I had a few drinks, fear of people and of economic insecurity would leave me.
11. When I had a few drinks, I would intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle me.
12. When I had a few drinks, I would suddenly realize that alcohol was doing for me what I could not do for myself.

[Now, let's go back to the Doctor's Opinion where we left off...where the paragraph ends at the top of Page XXIX where the last lines of the page say, "This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery." [The book goes on...]

xxix:1 On the other hand-and strange as this may seem to those who do not understand-**once a psychic change has occurred, the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for alcohol, the only effort necessary being that required to follow a few simple rules.**

xxix:2 Men have cried out to me in sincere and despairing appeal: "Doctor, I cannot go on like this! I have everything to live for! I must stop, but I cannot! You must help me!"

xxix:3 Faced with this problem, **if a doctor is honest with himself, he must sometimes feel his own inadequacy.** Although he gives all that is in him, it often is not enough. One feels that **something more than human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change.**

Though the aggregate of recoveries resulting from psychiatric effort is considerable, we physicians must admit we have made little impression upon the problem as a whole. **Many types do not respond to the ordinary psychological approach.**

xxix:4 **I do not hold [that is, I do not agree with] with those who believe that alcoholism is entirely a problem of mental control.** I have had many men who had, for example, worked a period of months on some problem or business deal which was to be settled on a certain date, favorably to them. They took a drink a day or so prior to the date, and then the phenomenon of craving at once became paramount to [-- that is, dominant over] all other interests so that the xxx:0 important appointment was not met. **These men were not drinking to escape; they were drinking to overcome a craving beyond their mental control.**

xxx:1 There are many situations which arise out of the phenomenon of craving which cause men to make the supreme sacrifice rather than continue to fight. [The supreme sacrifice is suicide.]

xxx:2 The classification of alcoholics seems most difficult, and in much detail is outside the scope of this book. [1] There are, of course, the psychopaths who are emotionally unstable. We are all familiar with this type. They are always "going on the wagon for keeps." They are over-remorseful and make many resolutions, but never a decision.

xxx:3 [2] There is the type of man who is unwilling to admit that he cannot take a drink. He plans various ways of drinking. He changes his brand or his environment. [3] There is the type who always believes that after being entirely free from alcohol for a period of time he can take a drink without danger. [4] There is the manic-depressive type, who is, perhaps, the least understood by his friends, and about whom a whole chapter could be written.

xxx:4 [5] Then there are types entirely normal in every respect except in the effect alcohol has upon them. They are often able, intelligent, friendly people. {like me! grin}

xxx:5 All these, and many others, have one symptom in common: **they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving.** This phenomenon, [that is, these observable but mysterious episodes,] as we have suggested, may be the manifestation [the appearance] of an allergy which differentiates these people, and sets them apart as a distinct entity [or group]. It has never been, by any treatment with which we are familiar, permanently eradicated [or eliminated]. The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence [avoiding it entirely].

xxx:6 This immediately precipitates [or quickly takes] us into a seething caldron of debate. Much has been written pro and con, but among physicians, the general opinion seems to be that most chronic alcoholics are doomed.

xxxi:1 What is the solution? Perhaps I can best answer this by relating one of my experiences.

xxxi:2 About one year prior to this experience a man was brought in to be treated for chronic alcoholism. He had but partially recovered from a gastric hemorrhage and seemed to be a case of pathological mental deterioration. He had lost everything worthwhile in life and was only living, one might say, to drink. He frankly admitted and believed that for him there was no hope. Following the elimination of alcohol, there was found to be no permanent brain injury. **He accepted the plan outlined in this book.** [The solution is to accept the plan outlined in this book.] One year later he called to see me, and I experienced a very strange sensation. I knew the man by name, and partly recognized his features, but there all resemblance ended. From a trembling, despairing, nervous wreck, had emerged a man brimming over with self-reliance and contentment. I talked with him for some time, but was not able to bring myself to feel that I had known him before. To me he was a stranger, and so he left me. A long time has passed with no return to alcohol.

xxxi:3 When I need a mental uplift, I often think of another case brought in by a physician prominent in New York. The patient had made his own diagnosis, and deciding his situation hopeless, had hidden in a deserted barn determined to die. He was rescued by a searching party, and, in desperate condition, brought to me. Following his physical rehabilitation, he had a talk with me in which he frankly stated he thought the treatment a waste of effort, unless I could assure him, which no one ever had, that in the future he would have the "will power" to resist the impulse to drink.

xxxi:4 His alcoholic problem was so complex, and his depression so great, that we felt his only hope would be through what we then called "moral psychology," and we doubted if even that would have any effect.

xxii:1 However, he did **become "sold" on the ideas contained in this book.** [The solution is to become sold on the ideas contained in this book.] He has not had a drink for a great many years. I see him now and then and he is as fine a specimen of manhood as one could wish to meet.

xxxii:2 I earnestly advise every alcoholic to read this book through, and though perhaps he came to scoff [or ridicule], he may remain to pray.

William D. Silkworth, M.D.

[Dr. Silkworth says chronic alcoholics have an allergic reaction to alcohol. The allergy causes a craving, a thirst to drink much more, regardless of the consequences. Though abstinence is an obvious solution, the mental aspect of the disease requires a complete psychic change if chronic alcoholics – real alcoholics -- are to re-create their lives.]