

# Problem Drinkers

Indication as to the "success secret" of Alcoholics Anonymous in helping its 50,000 members, is given in a quote from one of its new members: "I had a lot of doubts when I joined the group at Riker's [penitentiary]. ...I didn't know how to figure these outside A.A.'s who came in once a week to talk to us...When they began to talk about getting drunk as being a symptom rather than a cause, I perked up my ears. But when they came right out and admitted that they, too, had pulled time in jails...I began to take a serious interest...When I came into this clubhouse, nobody asked me a lot of embarrassing questions...They just seemed like real friendly guys."

These revealing remarks are quoted in a vivid article in the January-March issue of *Federal Probation*, "I Think You Guys Mean It," written anonymously by another member of the organization who is a lawyer and the editor of a national magazine, as well as editor of *The Grapevine*, the A.A.'s own publication. The article describes the A.A. program for probationers, prison inmates and parolees who are problem drinkers. A.A. chapters have been established in more than thirty penal and correctional institutions. Meeting once a week in groups of thirty or forty, under the supervision of prison authorities and chapter members, inmates hear talks by visiting A.A. members, and are encouraged to ask questions, make suggestions, and join in the discussion. New members are carefully screened to make sure of their sincere desire to stop drinking.

In A.A.'s work with alcoholic

probationers, the prisoner is placed on probation to an A.A. "sponsor," who is responsible for his supervision. The sponsor introduces him to a local A.A. clubhouse, and goes with him to regular meetings. The new member is made to feel that he "belongs" to the group and is "one of the family."

Now in its thirteenth year, A.A. has 1,200 chapters including outposts in Canada and Latin America, and is winning about 1,000 new members a month, according to the February issue of *Time*. Supported by donations from members, it has no offices, no dues, no big funds. Members are pledged to help all other alcoholics, but give assistance only when called upon. Anonymity is an important rule of the organization, in order that new members may be encouraged to join.

Of its members, some 50 per cent have stopped drinking entirely after joining, 25 per cent have succeeded after one or two slips. By contrast, all but 5 per cent of alcoholics were formerly considered hopeless of cure, according to the *Time* report.

## Yale Plan

Hopeful news for the nations alcoholics, who now number an estimated 750,000, is the success of the Yale Plan Clinic at Yale University. Eighty percent of those who continue through the full period of treatment at the clinic recover, Dr. Howard W. Haggard, Yale physiologist, declared recently in an address before the Washington Committee for Education on Alcoholism.

The clinic is operated on an out-patient basis, with a small staff consisting of a psychiatrist, a social worker, a secretary, and a part time physician. Hospital facilities of near-by hospitals are utilized when necessary.

The small cost of the treatment given at this clinic - averaging \$68 a case - is stressed in an article in *Wisconsin Welfare*, written in support of this type of care. By contrast, the article points to the high costs of the usual method of dealing with alcoholics, citing a study by William Oldigs, chief probation officer of Milwaukee County. The study found that a major percentage of the inmates of the county House of Correction were excessive drinkers.

The actual cost of keeping an alcoholic at the House of Correction for ninety days was

computed at \$218.51, and of keeping a family of four on relief during the period, at \$380.85 - an average of \$599.36 per case.

### Steps

Six states have set up commissions to study the problem of alcoholism, reports the *American Journal of Public Health*. In six other states, proposals are under way to set up commissions or other programs for the study of this disease.

Nineteen local citizen committees have been formed in eleven states and Washington, D.C. to educate the public in understanding alcoholism as a public health problem, the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism announced recently.