

Alcoholics Anonymous

Medicine Column

Last week one of the best-known teetotalers in the U.S., John D. Rockefeller, had 60 people to dinner. No cocktails were served, for several of Mr. Rockefeller's guests were members of "Alcoholics Anonymous," a widespread, publicity-shy group of one-time guzzlers who have cured themselves.

Psychiatrists now generally consider alcoholism a disease, specifically a psychoneurosis. Alcoholics generally drink, not just because they like liquor, but to escape from something--a mother fixation, inferiority feelings, an intolerable domestic situation, social or economic maladjustment. They may suffer the torments of the damned, even while drinking themselves into a stupor, and especially in the brief period between waking up with a remorseful, clattering hangover and getting down the first drink of the day. Psychiatrists try to help them by discovering the hidden reason for drinking and showing how it can be removed. But cynics in sanatoriums, watching a sober man walk out the door full of good intentions, often bet on how many days or weeks will elapse before he is back. Nagging by families usually makes things worse.

About five years ago a traveling salesman named Bill, after repeated alcoholic relapses, was pronounced hopeless by his doctors. Bill was an agnostic, but someone asked him if he

couldn't believe that there was some power bigger than himself--call it God or whatever he liked--that would help him not to drink. The idea was that though Bill was always willing to let himself down, he might be more reluctant to let God down. Bill tried it, found that he had no trouble resisting the desire to drink. He was cured. He told his discovery to others, and the cure spread. These reformed drunkards called themselves "Alcoholics Anonymous," now number over 400 in towns all over the U.S. They do their missionary work on their own time, as an avocation.

Aware of this interest in liquor control, some of the group wrote to John D. Rockefeller two years ago--asking not for money but for advice. Mr. Rockefeller asked a representative to look into their doings, grew so interested that he helped to publish a book, *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Works Publishing Co.; \$3.50), in which some members described their battles with the demon and how they won.

Professional opinion on the usefulness of Alcoholics Anonymous is divided. Some psychiatrists think the group is making a mistake in not leaning more heavily on medical guidance. Others feel that it gives something that psychiatry does not, should be encouraged to the fullest extent.