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NOTES ON AKRON, OHIO SURVEY
by
FRANK AMOS

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The self-styled Alcoholic Group of Akron, Ohio and vicinity, came into being through the visit of William G. Wilson of Brooklyn.

Wilson was an alcoholic of years experience who, through a definite religious experience with which we are all acquainted and which is testified to by Dr. William D. Silkworth, psychiatrist at the Charles B. Town Hospital, 293 Central Park West, New York, had visited Akron on business. Following out one of the essential points in the technic of reforming incurable alcoholics, Wilson had sought out an "incurable" like himself to "work on". Through one of the Christian Ministers he located Dr. Robert H. Smith, a proctologist (rectal surgeon), who for years had been an alcoholic and whose practice as a result had been just about ruined. Smith was ready for such an approach and within a short time followed completely in Wilson's footsteps.

Robert H. Smith, M.D.
Dr. Smith is 59 years old; preliminary college education at Dartmouth, then at University of Michigan, then at University of Chicago. After practising a period he took special training in proctology at Jefferson Medical College Hospital, Philadelphia. I checked up on Dr. Smith as follows:

Dr. G. A. Ferguson - one of Ohio's foremost eye specialists, located at Akron. Dr. Ferguson, a man of probably 45, told me Dr. Smith was a brilliant and skillful surgeon. He said there were no better in his line within his knowledge. He stated, however, that for years, Smith's drinking had grown worse, that he, Ferguson, had at different times carted him home drunk as had other doctor friends. As a result his medical brothers and his patients had about lost confidance in him solely because of his drunkenness. Nearly three years ago, he said, Smith had stopped drinking and ever since had been regaining the confidence of all. He was still today, said Ferguson, just as skillful a surgeon and regarded as highly by the profession as he was in his earlier days. Ferguson had learned of the work Smith was doing with alcoholics. Said he didn't fully understand it, but that it worked. He was for it and had unbounded admiration for Smith both professionally and in this work. He stated further that Smith was called upon to give so much of his time, free, to this work with alcoholics that it was very difficult for him to handle enough professional business to make a decent living. He thought it was vital for Smith to continue this work but needed help so he could better organize it personally and improve his practice.

Dr. Howard Searl- General practitioner at Cuyahoga Falls, aged about 35. Searl had been an alcoholic and had been cured by Smith and his friends' activity and the Christian technique prescribed. Searl said that Smith stood at the top of his profession. He said Smith was the keystone of the alcoholic reform movement there and that something must be done to help him so he could regain more of his remunerative practice and still give much of his time to this work. At present his work with alcoholics was taking an average of 10 hours

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a day. Searl thought Smith should head a small hospital for this purpose.

Judge Benner - Formerly Probate Judge and for 40 years Chairman of the Board of the Akron City Hospital. Benner is credited with having put this hospital in the position of being one of the finest in the mid-west. Benner said that only physicians of the highest standing were permitted on their staff, and that Smith stood at the top professionally. Benner said further that he knew all about Smith's alcoholic troubles; had seen him come out of them and was with him 100% in his fine work. His Board, he said, was proud to give Smith fullest privileges in handling alcoholics at City Hospital. He didn't claim to understand the method but whatever it was he said it worked and he was for it. Benner impressed me as an able judge and lawyer probably in his sixties.

Mrs. Henrietta Sieberling - Daughter-in-law of F. A. Sieberling. Mr. Sieberling has been active in the Oxford Group. Had become well acquainted with Mrs. Smith while the Doctor was drinking heavily. She had seen Smith come out of it and ever since had been a supporter of the alcoholic group, insofar as she could help. She expressed unstinted admiration for Dr. Smith and the entire group who have followed him.

T. Henry Williams - Formerly Chief Engineer of the National Rubber Machinery Co., now one of the owners of a rival rubber machinery company. Mr. and Mrs. Williams are devout and practical Christians. They have become so impressed with the work of Smith and his associates that they turn over their home to them twice weekly for religious and social gatherings.

Alcoholic Group

There are now some fifty men, and, I believe, two women former alcoholics, all considered practically incurable by physicians, who have been reformed and so far have remained teetotalers. A list of some of them is attached giving their business, the length in months they have been "dry", the period in years they were drinking, and their present age. I met and talked with about half of these men with their wives and, in one or two cases, their mothers. They told me varying stories, many of them almost miraculous, but all remarkably alike in the technique used and the system followed. Briefly this system is:

1. An alcoholic must realize that he is an alcoholic, incurable from a medical viewpoint and that he must never again drink anything with alcohol in it;

2. He must surrender himself absolutely to God realizing that in himself there is no hope;

3. Not only must he want to stop drinking permanently, but he must remove from his life other sins such as hatred, adultery and others which frequently accompany alcoholism. Unless he will do this, absolutely, Smith and his associates refuse to work with him.

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4. He must have devotions every morning - a "quiet time" of prayer, and some reading from the Bible and other religious literature. Unless this is faithfully followed, there is grave danger of backsliding;

5. He must be willing to help other alcoholics get straightened out. This throws up a protective barrier and strengthens his own will power and convictions;

6. It is important, but not vital, that he meet frequently with other reformed alcoholics and form both a social and religious comradeship;

7. Important, but not vital, that he attend some religious service at least weekly.

All the above is being carried out faithfully by the Akron group and not a day passes when there is not one or more new "victims" to work on with Smith as their leader by common consent.

Dr. Smith's position

Previous statements give a good idea, I hope, of Dr. Smith's present importance in this work at Akron. There are other able men in the group but they all look to him for leadership. There are a few from Cleveland but they have not yet found a leader there. Non-alcoholics, Christian ministers, Oxford groupers, Christian Scientists, and others have tried and failed. Apparently with most of these cases it takes a former alcoholic to turn the trick with an alcoholic, and a fine physician of excellent standing, himself formerly an alcoholic and possessed of natural leadership qualities has proved ideal.

Paul Stanley says, "Most of us have our jobs and can make a good living. I am an insurance man and can go out agressively for business. Smith as a reputable and ethical physician can't be an ambulance chaser or advertise himself. All he can do is to meet regularly with physicians, keep up his professional contacts, since from that source he, as a rectal surgeon, must get most of his surgical patients. At present his income is so low that he can't keep an office secretary and finds it difficult to meet his necessary home expenses. Either we must help him or he must give up most of this alcoholic work." Stanley feels it would be criminal, at this time, to lose Smith as their leader. Mr. Williams, with whom I discussed the same matter stating that I was speaking for four Christian laymen who were interested, expressed practically the same ideas as Stanley.

I suggest that we try to arrange on a confidential basis, with only a small carefully selected committee knowing anything about it, for a monthly remuneration for Dr. Smith for a period of at least two years until the whole proposition could get well going and perhaps be absolutely self-supporting in every way.

Dr. Smith has a wife - a lovely, cultured lady who supports him to the limit in this work - and a son and daughter around the ages of 13 and 20. His modest home is mortgaged and he has not been able to keep it in proper

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repair. He needs a competent secretary not only to receive his calls when not in the office (his office hours are from 2 to 4 P.M.), but one who is thoroughly sympathetic with this work and who could handle a lot of assignments and details with other reformed alcoholics in routing them to see patients etc. which Smith himself has to do now. Mrs. Smith has her hands full with the home and with her work with wives of alcoholics, also with an occasional woman alcoholic who turns up. Smith says that men can rarely work satisfactorily with women alcoholics. The sex problem makes it difficult. He, as a physician, can and has helped, but his wife and other wives must handle most of this, for which there is a growing need. Such a secretary would cost about $1,200 a year. Smith needs to keep a good car - he now drives an Oldsmobile of somewhat ancient vintage - to afford swift, safe, prompt transportation. He needs better office facilities not only for his regular paying patients, but to better handle these ex-alcoholics who come to him daily for inspiration and instruction. Altogether I think a sum of around $5,000 a year for two years should be made available to help make up for his loss of practice, to pay a secretary, and to meet expenses which he cannot possibly handle under present circumstances. I am sold on attempting this at once.

Local Support

For reasons which I can explain verbally, not much local financial support can be secured at present. I believe within two years much, if not all, needed support can be secured.