



"... It was five years ago I first met you, Bill... I shall never forget, nor cease to be grateful."

Dr. Bob (1940)

WILLIAM GRIFFITH WILSON
(1895-1971)

Bill was born in East Dorset, Vt., November 26, 1895, the only son of Emily and Gilman Barrows Wilson. His elementary education began in a two-room schoolhouse in East Dorset, then continued in Rutland, where his father took over the operation of a marble quarry. He next attended Burr and Burton Seminary in Manchester and completed his secondary education at the Arlington (Mass.) High School.

In 1914, he entered Norwich University, a military college in Vermont, and completed three

years of an electrical engineering course. Further education was forestalled at this point by the outbreak of World War I. After a period of military training, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army and saw service in France with the 66th Artillery Corps. It was during this period of military service that he started to drink, with disastrous results almost at once.

Bill married Lois Burnham of Brooklyn, N.Y., on January 24, 1918, shortly before leaving for active duty.

Returning home after the Armistice, he worked briefly in the insurance department of the New York Central Railroad. From 1921 to 1925, he was an investigator for the U.S. Fidelity & Guaranty Company, located in New York City. During this time, he completed a three-year night law course at the Brooklyn Law School.

In 1925, he became a field investigator for various groups with financial interests. His field reports on industrial properties and their managements were the basis for heavy investment and speculative commitments, in which he was frequently given an interest.

By 1931, however, his drinking had become a serious problem. Despite Lois's efforts and the many promises and pledges to stop drinking made to her and business associates, the compulsion to drink was too strong. Over the next three years, what had promised to be a brilliant Wall Street career rapidly deteriorated.

In November 1934, he learned from an old friend, Ebby, how the Oxford Group was able sometimes to help alcoholics; Ebby himself was a recent example. In Towns Hospital a month later, reflecting upon Ebby's message and in total despair, he cried out for help. Bill has described what then occurred as an overwhelming and awesome spiritual experience, carrying the conviction of a release from drinking and an insight that in helping other alcoholics he could maintain his own sobriety.

While attending Oxford Group meetings, he tried to sober up many alcoholics over the next six months, without success. In May 1935, a business trip to Akron, Ohio, led to his meeting with Dr. Bob, who became the second successful recovery—and Alcoholics Anonymous was born.

(cont.)



"Simplicity, devotion, steadfastness, and loyalty; these were the hallmarks of Dr. Bob's character which he has well implanted in so many of us."

Bill

ROBERT HOLBROOK SMITH, M.D.
(1879-1950)

Dr. Bob was born August 8, 1879, in St. Johnsbury, Vt., the only son of Judge and Mrs. W. P. Smith, who were prominent in civic and social activities of that city. Though often rebellious against the strict authority of his parents, "Rob," as his schoolmates affectionately called him, was willing to work hard to attain whatever he sincerely wanted; by the time he was nine, he knew he wanted to be a physician.

In his teens, he spent parts of his summers working on a Vermont farm and in an Adiron-

dack summer hotel. Despite his dislike of school, he was a good student and graduated from St. Johnsbury Academy in 1898.

He spent four years at Dartmouth College, graduating in 1902. It was during these school years that drinking became a major activity, though in those days he was never involved in serious trouble because of it.

Three years later, having worked at various jobs in Boston and Montreal, and still determined to become a doctor, he entered the University of Michigan as a premed student. Here, the pace of his drinking accelerated, and in his sophomore year he left school temporarily, feeling he couldn't complete his course. But he returned, took his exams, and passed them. In 1910, after further training at Rush Medical College in Chicago, he received his medical degree and secured an internship in City Hospital, Akron, Ohio. Completing his internship in 1912, he opened an office in the Second National Bank Building in Akron, remaining there until his retirement in 1948.

In 1915, he married Anne Ripley, whom he had met while attending St. Johnsbury Academy. As

time went on, his alcoholism progressed steadily, yet he was able to function, and few of his colleagues knew how serious his illness was.

Besides being an active member of the City Hospital staff in Akron, he often visited St. Thomas Hospital, also in Akron, where, in 1928, he met Sister Ignatia for the first time. Later, in 1934, he became associated with St. Thomas and in 1943, became a member of the active staff.

In the early thirties, Dr. Bob, in desperate search for an answer to his problem, began to attend meetings of the Oxford Group, feeling he could benefit from a study of its philosophy and other spiritual teachings. Though he continued to drink, he maintained his interest and activity in the group, due in large part to Anne's deep interest.

In May 1935, a meeting with another alcoholic, Bill Wilson, led to his own permanent sobriety and to the formation of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is estimated that Dr. Bob, with the help of Sister Ignatia, guided some 5,000 fellow alcoholics to recovery during his 15 years of loving ministry to them.

(cont.)

BILL (cont.)

Bill's service to Alcoholics Anonymous spanned a period of 36 years, during which time, with the help of other oldtimers, he formulated A.A.'s recovery program, codified into a set of traditions the first ten years of its group experience, wrote four books for the movement, and contributed numerous articles about A.A. to internal and outside publications. He often spoke before medical, psychiatric, and religious societies, and testified (in closed session) before various state and Federal legislative committee hearings on alcoholism. During his lifetime, he declined all public honors, setting an example for the whole Fellowship.

Much of his A.A. life was devoted to building a sound structure for the Fellowship, helping first, in 1938, to establish a board of trustees. Following the writing and publication of "Alcoholics Anonymous" (the "Big Book") in 1939, he was concerned with setting up a publishing company and service office for the fledgling movement.

DR. BOB (cont.)

What manner of man was Dr. Bob? According to his son: "He had tremendous drive, great physical stamina. He was reserved and formal on first acquaintance, but as you came to know him, he was just the opposite: friendly, generous, full of fun . . . he loved a good joke so much. Regarding A.A., he tried to make every decision in the best interests of the group, to the exclusion of any personal advantage. He never ceased to be surprised that so many people sought him out, but felt he had only been God's agent and so was not due any personal credit."

Bob and Anne lived simply; if he had any pride of possession, it was for automobiles. He played bridge expertly, always playing to win! An avid reader, he read for at least an hour each night of his adult life, "drunk or sober." He was a fight fan, succumbing finally to television so he could watch the fights as regularly as his schedule would allow.

A fuller account of Dr. Bob's life was published in the A.A. Grapevine, January 1951; of Bill's, in the March 1971 issue.

As A.A. grew, he saw the need for calling together a conference of delegates whose function would be to serve as a permanent linkage between the groups and its major service board. This was initiated in 1951. In 1955, when the Conference (U.S. and Canada) structure proved workable after its trial period, he stepped down from active leadership, though maintaining a deep personal interest in seeing to completion certain structural changes he believed to be necessary. The last decade of his life was devoted largely to non-A.A. activities.

All his life, Bill retained, as did Dr. Bob, a deep affection for and identification with the people of Vermont; he and Lois returned there often for spiritual refreshment. An able and amusing storyteller, he enjoyed sharing with friends many delightful anecdotes about his early years.

Bill died of pneumonia in Miami Beach, Fla., on January 24, 1971. It seems fitting that his final resting place lies within the shadow of the Vermont mountain he loved as a child.

He held three concepts in particularly high regard. One was simplicity—in his own life-style and in practicing the A.A. way of life. At the Cleveland Convention, he emphasized: "Let's not louse it all up with Freudian complexes and things that are interesting to the scientific mind, but have little to do with our actual A.A. work." He was referring, of course, to those members who wanted to analyze, rather than utilize, our Twelve Step program of recovery. Second, he believed in tolerance of other people's ideas, in speaking out "with kindness and consideration for others," and in "guarding that erring member, the tongue." Third, he believed that one's job in A.A. was to "get sober and stay sober" and "never to be so complacent that we're not willing to extend that help to our less fortunate brothers."

Dr. Bob firmly believed that "love and service" are the cornerstones of Alcoholics Anonymous. He died of cancer at City Hospital, Akron, November 16, 1950.

THE CO- FOUNDERS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

