

The kindly faced man lying in the white hospital bed raised his hand to the light, studied it calmly and then remarked to the nurse standing by his bed: "I think this is it."

Thus Dr. Robert Holbrook Smith recently passed from the world. So, finally, the story of "Dr. Bob, beloved by 120,000 members of Alcoholics Anonymous whom he had helped to find the way back to respectability and happiness, can be told. At the death of his wife, Anne, a year before, Dr. Smith's identity had been revealed, but the story of the co-founder of A.A. remained a secret.

Dr. Bob was a boy in New England, 72 years ago, and his mother sent him to bed at 5 o'clock every evening. Just as regularly did he secretly arise, dress, and slip out the back way to continue the game with his boyhood pals. He learned early to revolt against authority. When he went away to college he became a steady drinker.

He had always wanted to be a doctor but his strong willed mother had always opposed it, and it was three years after he graduated from Dartmouth before he got up the courage to go to medical school. He drank so continuously he just did manage to get his degree. Once he went off on such a protracted binge that his fraternity brothers had to send for his father to straighten him out.

All this time Bob was corresponding with Anne, his high school sweetheart. That was as far as their courtship went. With the exception of two hard working years as an intern, he was seldom sober. Still, Anne, waiting for a miracle, married no one else.

The miracle happened, apparently, after a year-long period of heavy drinking left him terrified and on the wagon. In 1915 when he was 35 years old and some 17 years after he had first met her, he married Anne and brought her to Akron with him as his bride. They were happy for several years - until the Eighteenth Amendment was passed.

The Grapevine, the official magazine of Alcoholics Anonymous, explains in the weird logic of the alcoholic what happened then. Dr. Bob figured that since he'd soon be unable to get any more alcohol, he might as well drink up what there was. Despite prohibition, he never found it difficult to get more. From then on, he had a regular pattern. He began drinking every afternoon at four. Every morning he'd quite his tortured nerves with sedatives and, trembling, go to work to make enough money to buy alcohol for four o'clock. That went on for 15 years.

In the meantime, a New York broker who had drunk himself out of prominence discovered that when he was trying to talk drunks into going on the wagon, he had less craving for liquor. This broker, known to A.A.'s as Bill W., went to Akron on a business deal in 1935. The deal fell through and Bill found himself once more a failure, with only 2\$ in his pocket. He knew right away that he had his choice: find a drunk to talk to, or get drunk himself.

Fortunately, he found a drunk, Dr. Bob.

Bill moved in with Dr. Bob and straightened him out. When he and Dr. Bob wanted a drink, they'd go out and find a drunk to talk to. They sobered up a number of habitual drinkers in Akron that way and then their fame began reaching out to other cities. Slowly, gradually, the idea spread.

Almost before Dr. Bob and Bill, the co-founders, were aware of it, Alcoholics Anonymous was a going concern.

The book, Alcoholics Anonymous, was written. It is now in its 13th printing. People began to write in from all over the world. Some were alcoholics themselves, some were mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, husbands, wives or friends of alcoholics. They all got an answer.

Dr. Bob, who had devoted half his life to drinking, still found himself a slave to alcohol - only now it was on the other fellow's breath. He personally visited some 5,000 in Akron hospitals, encouraging them. As his period of sobriety increased, more and more patients came to him, and it looked as though one part of his ambition, to own a convertible, might not be impossible after all.

Finally he made it. Last year he got a new yellow convertible. The Grapevine pictures him, at the age of 71, speeding through the streets of Akron in it. "The long slim lines made even more rakish with the top down.

No hat, his face to the sun, into the driveway he sped. Pebbles, flying, tires screeching, he'd swoosh to a stop. And, just then, before he put 150 miles on the gleaming yellow convertible, Dr. Bob's malignant disease took a turn for the worse and he had to give up driving. He died a few months later.

Bill W. explained why there will be no imposing monument to this man who saved so many people from alcoholism. When it was once suggested, last year, Dr. Bob said: "Anne and I plan to be buried just like other folks." And so only a simple plaque in the alcoholic ward of St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, where Dr. Bob did so much of his work, commemorates.