

ROWLAND THE MESSENGER

(Rowland Hazzard brought the message to Ebby Thatcher who brought the message to Bill Wilson.)

By Ron Ray, 9/24/92, from Bowling Green, KY

After telling Rowland H. that he could never regain his position in society, Dr. Carl Jung the renowned Swiss psychiatrist was asked, "Is there no exceptions?" "Yes," replied Dr. Jung, "there is. Exceptions to cases such as yours have been occurring since early times. Here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences." He went on to describe a spiritual experience as "To me these occurrences are phenomena. They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them" (pages 26/27 in the "Big Book" Alcoholics Anonymous).

The doctor admitted his failure in bringing about this psychic change and dashed water on Rowland's hope that his past strong religious convictions could alone bring on a "vital spiritual experience".

Rowland's father Rowland Gibson H. (the H. family tree has an unbroken chain of "Rowlands" dating back to 1763 with alternate ones named "Rowland Gibson H.") was superintendent of the Congregational Sabbath School for twenty-five years. The comments in the "Big Book" coupled with the apparent religious upbringing in his father's home would lead us to the conclusion that a belief in God was an ingrained value in Rowland's life. His mother's father, a Yale graduate, was a man of the cloth. At the time of his death (12/20/1945) Rowland was a vestryman in Calvary Episcopal Church in New York City and a member of St. Peter's-by-the-Sea, Narragansett, R.I. AA students will identify Calvary Episcopal with Rev. Sam Shoemaker and the Oxford Group that served as a spiritual support group in Bill W.'s and other early sober alcoholics lives. According to Lois W., Rowland was an "ardent Oxford Grouper until his death." (In 1938, the Oxford Group changed its name to Moral Re-Armament or MRA). There is no mention in any of three detailed and lengthy obituaries of his affiliation with either the Oxford Group or MRA. The Rev. Sam Shoemaker, one of the founders of the Oxford Group in the U.S., broke with the Movement in 1941, a full four years before Rowland's death. During the late thirties and early forties, many Groupers distanced themselves from the misunderstood views of Frank Buchman, the principle founder of the Movement. While they may have fled from the Group, it is difficult to believe they abandoned its teaching of Absolute Love, Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, and Absolute Unselfishness; nor the practice of self-evaluation, confession, restitution, guidance from God and working with others. The Oxford Group teachings and practices were not distant from AA's Twelve Steps.

The H. family of Rhode Island was a paragon of respectability, governmental dedication, industrial leadership and family values. Their roots in Rhode Island reach back over 350 years as early settlers of the colony. Rowland was the 10th generation of H.'s in Rhode Island. His forebearers were large landowners, manufacturers, and men of learning in literature and science who left their imprint on America as achievers, leaders and philanthropists. It was into this vivid family background that Rowland H. was born 10/29/1881; two years after Dr. Bob and fourteen years before Bill W.

Rowland grew up in wealth, respectability and in a family that placed great value on human relations. His grandfather of the same name was known as the "Father of the American Alkali Industry." Unlike robber barons of his day, Grandfather Rowland had great respect for the dignity of his employees. At the family Woolen Mills in Rhode Island, he introduced one of the first employee profit sharing programs in America. After the purchase of a lead mine in Missouri in 1874 he found the miners living in "ignorance, wretchedness, squalor and drunkenness." He shortened the workweek, built decent housing and started a school. He wrote, "Place a people face-to-face with vast labors, lower the physical tone by an enervating climate, let them find by experience that the labors are too great for their powers; and listless, slipshod habits result with

whisky as a relief from trouble." In 1875, his fellow industrialists must have considered this enlightened statement liberal and radical.

Rowland's grandmother Margaret is credited with introducing one of the first kindergartens to America. His Aunt Caroline was at the turn of the century President of Wellesley College and father Rowland Gibson was President of Peace Dale Manufacturing, Peace Dale, RI, and Vice-President of Solvay Process Co., Syracuse, NY.

Growing to manhood in an exciting and active environment filled with people who were making things happen was an education of its own. The H. family had its cluster of estates in Peace Dale. There was Oakwood, built in 1954 by grandfather Rowland; Holly House, where young Rowland lived from age 11; Aunt Helen's home, the Acorns, where 1941 Pulitzer Prize winning poet Leonard Bacon grew to adulthood; and Scallop Shell, home of Aunt Caroline upon her return from Wellesley.

Rowland attended Fay School in Southboro, Mass., and Taft School in Watertown, CT. The well-to-do customarily sent their young men to prep school for an education directed toward college and for training in moral disciplines and social manners.

On to Yale in 1899, Rowland received a Bachelor-of-Arts degree with the class of 1903. At Yale he was called "Ike", "Roy" and "Rowley". He sang in the freshman and Varsity Glee Club as well as the chapel choir.

Rowland's choice of Yale was a break from his father's and grandfather Rowland's tradition of Brown University. His mother's father and their side of the family including such relatives as Eli Whitney of cotton gin fame, were Yale attendees.

In today's vernacular it could be said Rowland was born and raised with a silver spoon in his mouth. Yet while coming from a lofty station in life, he was by several accounts not aloof from his fellow man.

The years following Yale were spent learning the family business. Peace Dale Manufacturing Company was the base industry from which the family fortune sprang. The Woolen Mill was in the family's ownership from 1802 to 1918. During the Civil War, it was a major producer of army blankets. At the mill, Rowland started out in the wool-sorting department. By the time Rowland entered the milling business, it was in its waning years in the North. On the death of his father, the mill was sold to the Stevens Company and the manufacturing was eventually relocated in North Carolina.

The family had many investments and businesses far more interesting and exciting than the wool mill. One such business was Semet-Solvay, the nations leading producer of Coke and Coke ovens. Its sister company, Solvay Process Company, produced soda ash, caustic soda, calcium chloride, ammonia, and soda bicarbonate. The latter was sold exclusively to Church and Dwight of "Arm & Hammer" brand fame. Rowland worked first for Semet-Solvay in Chicago but in 1906 he was transferred to Syracuse.

The 3rd Annual Yale Class of 1903 Reunion Book made a special note that Rowland had an appendectomy in 1906 and spent the summer recuperating in Peace Dale. Hardly worthy of note today, but in 1906 any abdominal surgery was a major medical procedure.

Following his recuperation, he returned to Peace Dale Manufacturing as Secretary-Treasurer. Working up the business ladder as son-of-the-owner is much more rapid than as the normal aspiring employee. Not intending to distract from Rowland's ability as a business manager, he did have doors of opportunity open more quickly because he was a H. of Rhode Island. Life in the business world could be adjusted to accommodate his desired lifestyle, which is the reverse of most struggling business managers.

The winter of 1909-10 was spent traveling in the west. Upon return he married Helen, a graduate of Briar Cliff and the daughter of a Chicago banker. He was just short of 29 when the marriage took place in October 1910. They spent the next few months abroad. The H. family was involved in local, state and national politics. It came as part of being a H. that Rowland became active in the Republican Party. He attended the exciting Republican National Convention as a delegate in 1912. The convention re-nominated President William H. Taft. From 1914 to 1916 he served in the Rhode Island State Senate.

As World War I got underway, Rowland became a civilian member of the Ordnance Department. Later he resigned to accept a commission as Captain in the Army's Chemical Warfare Service.

Helen and Rowland had four children: Caroline (1913), Rowland Gibson (1917), Peter (1918) and Charles W.B. (1920).

When Rowland's father died in 1918 neither he nor younger brother Thomas wanted to manage the day to day operation of the several companies the H. family controlled.

Peace Dale Manufacturing was sold 7/1/1918, to the Stevens Company. Semet-Solvay Company and the Solvay Process Company joined with three other chemical companies 12/17/1920, to create Allied Chemical and Dye Corporation (now Allied Signal, an 18 billion dollar corporation). Rowland was a member of the board of directors from Allied's inception until his death. He also served for many years on the board of Interlake Iron Corporation, another H. family holding. Any problem Rowland had with alcohol did not lead to his dismissal from either board. However, with the H. family so deeply invested in the corporations, the antics of the drinker can be explained away and covered up. "There is corporate denial."

The socially prominent families of the 1920's and 30's were mum on family problems; especially were they guarded about moral weakness in their ranks. In that day, many considered alcoholics to be morally weak. The onset of Rowland's problem with alcohol is difficult to fix. There are some events that would lead us to believe it could have been as early as 1918.

When his father died, why did not Rowland take over the operating helm? He was 37 and had held several positions within the corporations. Brother Thomas was 26 and only three years out of college. Thomas, not Rowland, became the one to administer the estate, a responsibility of great entrustment.

There is a brief mention of Rowland being President of Solvay Securities (likely another H. family holding) from 1918-1921. His obituary shows that 1920 to 1927 he was a member of Lee Higginson & Company, a New York investment banking firm. The record shows he resigned Lee Higginson in 1927 to travel in Africa, an adventure generally reserved for the royal and rich of that time.

We know that in 1931 he was under the care and treatment of Dr. Carl Jung in Zurich, Switzerland. On page 26 of the "Big Book" we find this insight into Rowland's battle with alcohol: "For years he had floundered from one sanitarium to another. He had consulted the best known American psychiatrists." This statement leads us to believe that several years prior to 1931 Rowland and his family recognized he had an alcohol problem. Ebby T., who carried the message to Bill W. had this to say about Rowland: "I was very much impressed by his drinking career, which consisted of prolonged sprees where he traveled all over the country."

The 1927 to 1935 period is vague and sketchy. Yet in reading accounts of Rowland's life as reported in Yale Class Reunion Books and his obituary, one is left with the feeling they go to great effort to explain Rowland's absence from Wall Street.

The published account of that eight-year period is a mixture of health problems and private ventures away from Peace Dale and New York City. While in Africa, he contracted a tropical disease and in 1928 he traveled to the west coast for his health. In 1929 he bought a ranch in New Mexico. Upon discovery of high-grade clay on the ranch, he organized in 1931-32 the La Luz Clay Products Company to produce floor and roof tile. In 1932 he took up residence in Vermont. Between 1932 and 1936 he divided his time between Vermont and New Mexico. There is no mention of his travel to Zurich in 1931 or the "about one year" in Dr. Jung's care as mentioned in Bill W.'s January 1963 letter to the doctor.

Bill writes to Dr. Jung: "Mr. H. joined the Oxford Groups, an evangelical movement then at the height of its success in Europe.... Returning to New York, he became very active with "O.G." here, then led by an Episcopal Clergyman Dr. Samuel Shoemaker."

August 1934, Rowland was at his home in Shaftsbury, VT, 15 miles south of Manchester. It was during this stay in Shaftsbury that he learned through two other Groupers of Ebby T.'s possible six months sentence to Windsor Prison for repeated drunkenness. The two Groupers were Shep C. and Cebra G. whose father was the judge before whom Ebby was to appear. In Bennington, Rowland and Cebra G. intervened at the hearing and asked that Ebby be bound over to Rowland.

The Judge agreed and Rowland took Ebby to his home in Shaftsbury and later on to New York City where Ebby stayed with Shep C. Of the first meeting with Rowland, Ebby said, "...he was a good guy. The first day he came to see me he helped me clean up the place."

Ebby's carrying the message to Bill W. is well known but little is known about Rowland's personal sharing with Bill.

Robert Thomsen in his book "Bill W." reports that Bill could never recollect if it was Ebby or Rowland who gave him William James' "The Varieties of Religious Experience". A likely scenario is that Rowland gave the book to Ebby who in turn gave it to Bill.

Thomsen also reveals that Grace McC., Rowland H., Ebby and others would join with Bill around a little table in the rear of Stewarts Cafeteria for coffee and sharing after their O.G. meeting.

The absence of comment by Bill, Lois, Ebby and other early A.A. members about Rowland joining AA would lead us to conclude he didn't. Lois writes in "Lois Remembers", "...he remained an ardent Oxford Grouper until his death in 1945." Lois goes on to mention that Cebra G. later joined AA in Paris.

From Rowland's perspective there was no compelling reason to join AA. After all, by the time the "Big Book" was published he had been sober eight years. His sobriety is evidenced (page 26, "Big Book"), "But this man still lives and is a free man. He does not need a bodyguard nor is he confined. He can go anywhere on this earth where other free men may go without disaster, provided he remained willing to maintain a certain simple attitude."

In 1935 Rowland returned to Wall Street as general partner in Tailer & Robinson, a brokerage firm; 1938-39 he was associated with Lockwood Greene Engineers Inc.; 1940-41 Rowland was an independent consultant. This later job position is often a resume explanation for periods of unemployment. In 1941, Rowland became Executive Vice-President of Bristol Manufacturing of Waterburg, CT. Bristol (now Bristol Babcock of Watertown, CT.) is a leading manufacturer of industrial measuring and recording devices.

While at his office desk on Thursday 12/20/1945, Rowland suddenly died of a coronary occlusion. At the time of his death he and his wife Helen resided on Park Avenue in New York City but held a legal residence in Peace Dale, R.I.

His past few years had been filled with sadness. Rowland Gibson, his oldest son and a Captain in the Army, was killed in 1941. Peter, his second son, a navy pilot, deliberately flew his plane into a screen of American flax while pursuing a Japanese kamikaze plane. Peter was first reported missing in action March 1945 and later confirmed killed in action.

All the contributions Rowland and his famous family made in industry and through philanthropic activities, none has had a more far-reaching impact as his unselfish effort in sobering up one Ebby T. If not the first, certainly one of the earliest Twelfth Step calls. It opened the door to millions of hopeless alcoholics.