

Phases in the Drinking History of Alcoholics

Analysis of a Survey Conducted by the *Grapevine*,
Official Organ of Alcoholics Anonymous

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TO MY FRIENDS OF
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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INTRODUCTION

THE study of the genesis of alcoholism seeks, as a rule, such landmarks in the personality development as may indicate the problem which the individual attempts to solve by means of intoxication. There may or may not be a further attempt to understand why the alcoholic man or woman chooses this particular solution instead of some other means. Supplementarily there is usually a search for environmental elements which presumably foster such artificial adjustments as habitual inebriety.

Thus etiological research on what is commonly called alcohol addiction but less pretentiously may be designated as habitual inebriety* concerns itself primarily with psychodynamics leading up to—and social factors which may precipitate—gross inebriety. The weight is nearly all on the prealcoholic phase of alcoholism. The drinking career receives little attention in such studies. Phases of inebriety, forms of drinking, changes in the drinking pattern and even changes other than drinking habits occurring in the course of inebriety, do not appear to be regarded as significant landmarks in the development of alcoholism. Drinking histories of sorts are nearly always obtained but they are limited to such questions as the time heavy drinking began, what and how much the drinker consumed and how frequently, what kind of relief or discontent was brought about by drinking, why—if ever—the drinker went “on the water wagon” and whether there had been any hospitalization because of alcoholism. Such data are gathered routinely and seldom form the basis for any theoretical elaborations. There are, nevertheless, some investigators who see significance in the drinking behavior itself. Tiebout’s thoughtful paper on the syndrome of alcohol addiction† is one of the exceptional instances.

As the etiological research on inebriety is, by and large, carried out by psychotherapists it is quite understandable that the emphasis is on the psychological aspects leading to alcoholism and that little attention is given to the drinking behavior. The therapist proceeds from the assumption that the function of alcoholic intoxication is to solve a personality conflict. Consequently, the therapist explores his patient

*The term addiction conveys to many the idea of a physiological process but in the case of alcohol there is no evidence for such a process.

†TIEBOUT, H. M. The syndrome of alcohol addiction. *Quart. J. Stud. Alc.* 5: 535-46, 1945.