

The Paradox of the Alcoholic
by Austin Ripley

(Paradox - a statement that seems contrary to common sense yet is perhaps true.)

The alcoholic of course is many things, as we all know. He is the world's supreme paradox. He drinks not because he would, but because he must. He does not drink for pleasure, he drinks to pain. Yet he drinks. He will mortgage the wealth of the future, to pay off the debts of the past, so that he may drink up the non-existent present. He is the only one in nature, I think, who seeks stimulation in a sedative, only to find that it acts upon his nerves as excited misery. He seeks to inflate his puny ego in a provocative wine of Bacchus, and succeeds in shriveling his soul in the bitter gall of remorse. He escapes desperately to free himself from the facts of reality, and runs headlong into the prison of fantasy. Success is just as fatal as failure to the alcoholic. He will drink with exhilaration to success and to sadness and misfortune. He drinks to get high in the evening, knowing how low he will get in the morning. When the alcoholic smilingly gets to the first drink he can get, he is transported to heaven. And when he is unable to get the last drink he can pour, he is transported to hell. The alcoholic, like most people, thrill to the beauty of life, and then how frequently he seeks the ugliness of existence. When he is sober he craves to be drunk, when he is drunk he prays to be sober. Such is the weird paradox of the alcoholic that the only way in which he can feel better, is to drink that which makes him feel worse. He starts out on his drinking, no matter who he is, with all the dignity of a king, and winds up his drinking like a clown. So he goes, his incredible, incomprehensible, paradoxical way. Leaving in his wake his human wreckage, that which he does cherish most. Down the road of alcoholic oblivion he stumbles and staggers until he either finds himself at the door of Alcoholics Anonymous or death intervenes.