

Dr. William Duncan Silkworth

1873 – 1951

The A.A. Grapevine, April 1951

Dr. William Duncan Silkworth died of a heart attack in his home in New York, Thursday morning, March 22. Thus we of A.A. have lost the physical presence of the great doctor who was our first friend. He gave deep understanding and great encouragement to an infant society in the days when a lack of understanding or a word of discouragement might easily have killed it. He freely risked his professional reputation to champion an unprecedented spiritual answer to the medical enigma and the human tragedy of alcoholism. Without his blessing, our faith might well have died in its birth. He was a luminous exception to the rule that only an alcoholic understands an alcoholic. He knew us better than we knew ourselves... better than we know each other. Many of us felt that his medical skill, great as that was, was not at all the full measure of his stature. Dr. Silkworth was something that it is difficult even to mention in these days. He was a saintly man. He stood in an unusual relationship to truth. He was able to see the truth of a man, when that truth was deeply hidden from the man himself and from everyone else. He was able to save lives that were otherwise beyond help of any kind. Such a man cannot really die. Our friend has only left us... for a while.