

Mass, Thursday of Septua-
gesima Sunday, p. 147. 2nd
col. of the Saints, p. 660;

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3rd col. of the faithful de-
parted, p. 660; 4th col. at
priest's choice. Maybe black.

Why I Am a Total Abstainer.

(By Father John Elliot Ross, formerly Chaplain to
Catholic students, Columbia University, and lec-
turer in religious education, Teachers College.)

I was brought up in a home where we always had liquor....As a young man I sampled most of the drinks popular in the gay nineties--and liked them all--without ever going to excess. In fact, I was sure that I could always take my liquor like a gentleman.

What made me a total abstainer was my experience as a priest. In the days before the Great War, I was stationed in the old first ward of Chicago. There was a saloon on every corner of some blocks in the parish. We were represented in the city council by Hinky Dink and Bathhouse John, the former of whom advertised the biggest schooner in the city for five cents. All down Clark, and State, and Dearborn streets, in this ward, one could see men staggering along with the marks of debauchery written plainly on their faces. At the rectory we had a continuous stream of men--and women, too--who had been wrecked by drink, asking for material or spiritual assistance.

From that experience several conclusions came to stand out in my mind.

First, I became convinced that liquor was one of the greatest curses of our American life. There was hardly a family but had one member wrecked by drink. It was responsible for much of our poverty, and was at the bottom of innumerable crimes of violence and of sexual immorality. Moreover, the liquor traffic interrupted politics and settled like a blight over the whole city. Because of its manifold ramifications, liquor was the most important social evil oppressing our national life.

Secondly, I concluded that once the liquor habit had become firmly entrenched, it was almost unbreakable. I have known men who realized the harm liquor was doing to themselves and to their families, but who simply could not stay away from it. They took so-called cures over and over again, but they always went back to their cups.

Thirdly, I was persuaded that no man could be sure of his own strength. I had been a moderate drinker, and had felt confident of my power to remain such. But many of the drunkards I dealt with had once been just as strong as I was. Every drunkard, in fact, was once a moderate drinker. The only sure way of not becoming a drunkard was not to drink at all. Pride in one's own strength went before becoming a slave to drink.

And so I became a total abstainer. In the more than twenty years that have since elapsed, I have never regretted that resolution. It is a small price to pay for security. If I knew that I could be absolutely sure of never contracting cancer by doing without one simple article of diet, I should be a fool to indulge in it. Well, alcoholism is worse than cancer, because it wrecks not only the body but also the soul. Character degenerates under its evil influence. And I can be sure of never contracting alcoholism only by never taking alcohol.

It is true, of course, that many remain moderate drinkers all their lives. But no particular individual can be sure that he will be one of these. Even moderate drinking is inadvisable because it gives a certain sanction to drinking for those who will inevitably go to excess, and it cooperates with a traffic that has wrecked more human beings than any other one thing. I do not drink myself, both for my own sake, and for the sake of those to whom I might offer drink who would be unable to resist drinking too much.

(--From "The Allied Youth" of January, 1936.)

PRAYERS: (deceased) Rev. Thomas Levan, C.M., former president, DePaul University, Chicago; friend of Dan Keefe (Badin); father of Maurice Stack (Dillon). Ill, Pete Kern; E. C. Lattimer; Bill Smith; Father Broughal; Father Joseph J. Boyle, president University of Portland, Portland, Ore.; mother of Father Braunan; father of William J. Riley (Lyons).