

# "I CAN TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT ALONE"

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## DRINK AND YOUNG PEOPLE

THE convention of Catholic young people was drawing to an end. It had been a splendid manifestation of the fine spirit, the real leadership, the Catholic-mindedness, and the outstanding abilities of our young people; and we were feeling very proud of them. In fact, they were feeling just a little proud of themselves.

Then from the floor somebody tossed a bomb.

No; not a bomb made of explosive chemicals that would have blown up and killed a few dozen of the delegates. That might even have seemed a relatively minor explosion—if you'll pardon the irony. The bomb was phrased in words, and it was packed with unexpected dynamite. To the mere onlooker, the bystander, the bomb seemed innocent enough. All that the speaker from the floor proposed was this:

"I move that this convention go on record as favouring total abstinence for young people during their years in school."

That was all; just as guileless as that.

Bang! Bang!

Only the thing exploded with a bang that brought the reporters rushing back to the hall; that lifted twenty, thirty, forty young people to their feet in a wild demand for a chance to talk; that split the convention with a division as wide as the Grand Canyon; that sent fists waving in the air; that made young men grow red in the face as they shouted their arguments; that made the older members of the assembly sit back in sheer amazement.

When the chairman finally banged the gavel and asked for a vote on the resolution, the assembly voted it down in a roar of disapproval. There were some strong voices that cried out in favour of total abstinence, but they were simply overwhelmed in the tidal wave of opposition, the roar of those who saw no slightest reason why young men and young women should be asked to give up drinking hard liquor.

The next day the papers made a grand spread of it: "Catholic Young People Approve Drink; Reject Total Abstinence." And throughout the rest of the meeting those who had led the fight in favour of drink rubbed their hands in triumph and smiled complacent smiles.

## **Rejected.**

That was in the year 1930. The scene was Chicago; the representative Catholic young people numbered twenty-two hundred and came from the best schools in the entire nation.

I am writing this booklet in the frank first person, as Father Lord. It was not my first experience with young people and the question of drink. Two years before, in 1928, the first Students' Spiritual Leadership Convention had brought up the subject of total abstinence from intoxicating liquors merely as one resolution slipped into the midst of a number of others. It was passed by the assembled delegates simply because they could not reject that resolution without rejecting resolutions of loyalty to the Pope, of good citizenship, of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and to spread Catholic truth.

But once the voting was over, a committee of young men and young women called on me.

"That resolution on drink," they said, "destroyed the sincerity of our whole convention. We have no intention of keeping it. We voted it in simply because it was sandwiched in with the rest. That's too bad, and for us it took the edge off the whole convention and its work."

## **Prohibition Prejudice.**

In 1929 the young people, this time a convention of young men, after a hot fight rejected a similar resolution overwhelmingly. That by the way was in the painful days of national prohibition. The Catholic papers back in 1928 were hammering at the ridiculous eighteenth amendment; Al Smith was running for President on a platform that implicitly promised to wipe that silly law off our books; young people thought they were proving their manhood or

womanhood and their independence by defying the stupid amendment and following the lead of their elders, who were sinking temperance-by-legislation into a sea of bootleg and "rotgut."

In 1932 the students' resolution not to drink intoxicating liquor during their school years (and that meant all the way through college) came up again and was again overwhelmingly beaten. In 1934 the delegates trimmed the resolution down to a point where they went on record in favour of temperance in drinking, which was as emphatic a resolution as if they had commended the Ten Commandments, agreed not to kick their mothers in the teeth, and promised that under no circumstances would they blow up banks, drop baby brother head down on cement sidewalks, or send time bombs to objectionable neighbours. Temperance is simply the virtue by which we do not use things to commit mortal sin. But then it seemed some advance that the young people thought liquor should not be used for sinful purposes.

### **No Drinks on Dates.**

In 1934, too, the students determined not to drink in mixed company or on dates. If that promise had been kept, it would have been a pretty ample and exciting forward step. But I am sorry to say that the phrase if . . . kept is the whole kink in the sentence.

In 1936, after discussing liquor and admitting that it was doing a lot of harm to young people, that high school students were drinking more than was good for them, and that social events were often spoiled by the presence of liquor, the young people tabled all resolutions about drink, and for once I spoke out my mind. I waited until they had voted, for I wanted no resolution passed merely because of what I might think about it. But when the voting was all over and they had rejected everything that might have obliged them to refrain from drinking, I told them I hoped to meet some day a crowd of young people brave enough to face the liquor situation as it actually exists and strong enough to make up their minds to do something about it.

### **Big Change.**

Well, years have elapsed, as years will, and apparently I've met that group I was hoping for. In the spring of 1939 we sent to students all over the country a questionnaire in which we asked them whether they thought drinking among young people was becoming better or worse. Overwhelmingly they answered that it was becoming worse, and much worse.

We asked them whether they thought something should be done about young people's drinking. And they answered with a vigorous yes.

Then they went on to suggest a lot of things that they thought could be done. Most of the things were part of the good old national sport of buck passing, but just the same the answers showed clearly that the young men and young women of the year 1939 don't think that drinking is a matter of asserting their independence, of defying a silly law called prohibition, of proving their loyalty to Al Smith, of moving along with the crowd. They are just as much worried about drink and its consequences as we oldsters are.

### **No Emotion, Please.**

Hence this booklet. Hence this facing of a subject about which nobody really wants to talk. And hence my conviction that a lot of young people will read perhaps this far and then decline to read any farther.

But let me assure them that I have no intention of playing on their emotions. This is no pamphlet successor to "Ten Nights in a Bar room." I shall hold up no horrible examples as tear-jerkers. I shall not turn on the delirium tremens or parade the pink elephants. But I should be happy if you, young reader, and you who may have the responsibility for young leaders, would be willing to let me discuss dispassionately and objectively the question of young people and drink.

If after our discussion you disagree. may I ask you to let me know why? I have the highest esteem for honest opinion. If you agree, how about doing something definite? That definite something is the only solution. If drinking is an evil, then only young people can solve it for themselves. Is it an evil? And if it is, will they have the courage, the intestinal fortitude to do something about it?

### **Pictures in Indigo.**

I think that I am not painting a picture out of my own darksome, dank, dyspeptic imagination when I say that a lot of people think the whole drink situation these days is pretty bad. Quite a few shake their heads pessimistically and say, "If the advocates of drink wanted to bring back prohibition, they'd do just the things they are doing."

Reputable liquor manufacturers are running advertisements to prove that their hands are clean of the abuses that surround the selling of liquor. They don't approve, they pledge the nation, of selling liquor to minors. They think that a man should not take money that is needed for baby's shoes and spend it on another pint. They think that dives, dark and smelly, are not the best meeting places for the nation's womanhood and manhood. All of which is simply another way of saying that these abuses of drink are pretty widespread and that the liquor distillers are worried about them. The Brewers' Institute, a national organisation, has taken the same prophylactic stand. They don't want liquor abused. They don't want drink made a menace to young people. They dislike the old-time saloon. They are afraid of what will happen if widespread drunkenness continues, if it is a common sight to see young people staggering out of taverns, if women habitually sit in lounge cars of swank streamliners and drink all the way from Chicago to California, if drink becomes the most important form of recreation in America.

### **Frightened?**

It isn't the professional prohibitionist or the W.C.T.U.-er who is frightened by what liquor is doing; it's the man who is engaged in honestly making and honourably distributing liquor. Watch the changes in the character of beer and whisky advertisements, and you'll see how true that is: Drink Is a Luxury, Not a Necessity. It Can Be Used; It Must Not Use the User. And if it is sold to minors and habitual drunkards, the law must and should enter in and call a stop.

All of which is interesting, but it does not impress me. I'm interested rather in what young people tell me about drink.

They tell me that the taverns are holes-in-the-wall that smell for the most part to high heaven. The taverns are kept deliberately dark with a suggestive kind of low light, as if the things going on were not to be exposed to the clean daylight or the bright frankness of honest electric light. The young people tell me that roadhouses are usually dumps, or worse; that the entertainment is vile; that drunkenness there is the general rule; that immorality is encouraged.

(By the way, the G-men became interested in this problem recently and sent one of their smartest men across the country to investigate. His trip is chronicled in a book that was reviewed in the news magazines during the early spring of 1939. He said, among other things, that the number of professional prostitutes in the country was growing, and that they were recruited in largest numbers from the dine-dance-and-drink roadhouses and taverns of the country. Those are now the places where most young women fall into lives of professional and habitual sin.)

### **Saloons Are Out!**

On one thing everyone, whether he favoured the drinking of liquor or opposed it, seemed to agree in those remote pre-prohibition days: The saloon must go. When the Democratic Party promised to repeal the eighteenth amendment, the framers of that platform plank were careful to promise that the saloon would not return.

Well, the saloon came back all right; the leopard had not changed its spots, even if it had changed its name. The saloon became the tavern and the roadhouse, but the bar, the brass rail, the white-coated bar-tender, even the sawdust and the free lunch came rolling right back. But there were marked differences, and none of them good. In those ancient pre-prohibition days any woman who went into a saloon was invading an exclusively masculine empire. She was an intruder; she didn't belong. Or if she did belong, the saloon made no pretence to being respectable, and the woman laid no claims to being other than what everybody thought her. Saloons sometimes had a ladies' or family entrance. But ladies—ladies in name at least—furtively sneaked in, hoping that nobody would see them, and sat far, far back in little private compartments, where they would not be recognised for who—or what—they were.

### **Women Take Over.**

I don't need to tell the present generation that the saloon-turned-tavern is a hangout for the female "barfly."

One of Chicago's biggest and finest hotels opened a bar for men only. Men asked for it. They were sick of having

half-tight women hanging around, getting in the way of masculine drinking and masculine sociability. The bar lasted exactly one week. At the end of that time both the hotel and the men patrons gave up any attempt to keep women out; the women came in droves and defied anyone to eject them.

Following the women into the saloon-taverns came the young people, whom an honest bartender in pre-prohibition days would have pitched feet first out of his saloon on to the softest adjacent sidewalk.

I need not point out either that the presence of women and of young people in the saloon-tavern in no slightest way improved the atmosphere or the standard. Quite the contrary. The blues stories went on, only now there were slightly tipsy or drunken women there to giggle. Men's passions were aroused by hard drink; there were women close at hand to make temptation easy.

I need not indicate that under modern drinking conditions the problem of the man who drinks and the drunken man has widened to include the problem of the woman who drinks and the drunken woman. And the adolescents of today stagger and hiccough and go blind at an age when the adolescents formerly were content with milk-shakes and strawberry sodas.

### **Drink Spoils Parties.**

I am told by young people that they have a lot of trouble at their social affairs with the young man who arrives slightly obfuscated and who brings drink along or insists on buying it; that getting drunk at private parties is by no means the unusual thing; that young women go home in cars driven by young men who are so far gone that only a long-developed driving instinct and St. Christopher keep the car from curling around a lamp-post—though not always out of the path of 'buses and trucks and trains; that young women "pass out" on dates and wake up to find their virginity gone; that under the influence of drink young couples find themselves becoming maudlinly amorous, dangerously passionate; that some schools have had to forbid all dances and parties under school auspices— which had formerly been allowed and encouraged—because of abuses at those functions.

### **Hotel Evidence.**

Hotel managers have shown me beautiful parlours that had been wrecked by crowds of young people—mirrors broken, tables stained beyond hope of revarnishing, roses cut out of rugs for a joke. They have told me that the management has learned to remove all breakable objects when young people of a certain high school or college level come to their hotels for a party. "But," said one manager to me, "I'll show you what they can do."

He showed me the beautiful marble top of a fireplace split right down the centre by a drunken crowd of young people. This was, I may add, in one of the country's finest and most expensive hotels.

"Nowadays," another manager told me, "we demand a deposit for breakage. Then when the gang is gone, we count up the cost of the wreckage and take the expenses out of the deposit."

I'm not making this up. This is plain factual report from the hotels. Realism, if you like that word. But it speaks louder than I ever could on the whole subject of young people and drink.

### **Plain Disgusting.**

I've yet to meet a person who thought in sober moments that a drunken man was other than disgusting. The only time a drunken man seems amusing is when he is surrounded by people a little more drunk or just a little less drunk than himself. Then any silly thing he does, like putting on a 'woman's hat (certainly a most excruciating thing, a joke de luxe), seems terribly, terribly funny to his associates. But to sober people—that is, to the people whose intellectual judgment has not dropped down to the level of that of befuddled morons, he seems only a pitiable sight, only an object of distaste.

As for a drunken woman, notably a drunken young woman—Well what does she look like to you? I sat not so long ago at the lunch counter of a railroad station. In reeled a drunken young man and young woman dressed in expensive evening clothes, obviously blessed (or cursed) with money, clearly from what we call the upper stratum of society. They sat unsteadily on stools at the counter, drinking black coffee. They were maudlinly affectionate. Their speech was thick. Their gestures were unsteady and uncertain. She spilled coffee down the front of her beautiful frock. He

tried to wipe it off and fell off the stool in the process.

The man behind the counter laughed just once, a sharp, ironic, bitter laugh, a laugh so filled with contempt and disdain that it burned my ears. As for the rest of us— Well we could not keep our eyes off them. I saw heads draw together and lips curl as people made nasty comments. I left my breakfast unfinished and walked out into the fresh morning air.

The drunken young man was bad enough. The drunken young woman was something to make the angels weep. If angels can weep, I am sure they were weeping at that ugly, ignoble spectacle.

It is true that some men like women to drink, men who feel that a woman's drinking makes their own drunkenness seem less shameful. But I have never known a decent man who wasn't sick at the sight of a woman staggering from drink. I have never known a man who didn't feel that the whole human race was lowered in the person of a drunken woman.

### **Its Cost is High.**

Drinking, I am told by young people, is extremely expensive. I've noticed the price of drinks on the menus myself, and I confess that I don't see how most young people can afford to drink—at least drinks that have a basis of something besides fusel oil and raw alcohol. A good highball commands the same price as an evening at a first-run motion-picture theatre. A round of drinks for two couples costs more than a seat at a good play. You could buy a best-selling novel for the price paid for mixed drinks for four people.

The Government, hoping to control liquor drinking by making it expensive, slapped tremendous taxes on liquor in all forms. All that the Government has succeeded in doing apparently is to raise the price without lowering the quantity of consumption.

But I know young married couples who, horribly enough, can't "afford" to have a baby because their liquor bills are so high. I know young men who are broke all the week but still manage to save enough to spend a Saturday evening in a tavern, drinking expensive drinks with some crowd of young people. It is the only recreation these people have. Their sole form of entertainment consists in pouring questionable mixtures down their young throats and into their young brains.

### **Fanatic?**

Now, I hope I am not a fanatic. The statements I have made are really not my own; they are merely a repetition of what honest young people have told me. They echo the things I have seen with the most objective eyes. For I think I have a fairly sane attitude towards liquor. As I understand it, the following things are unquestionably true:

In themselves alcoholic drinks are neither good nor bad. Neither, to take instances from the two extremes, are apples or opium, prunes or morphine good or bad. Use is what determines the goodness or badness of all these things. A man can become deliberately sick on green apples or take opium for the thrill of the thing. But apples may do him a deal of good on the principle that an apple a day keeps the doctor busy with patients other than oneself. Or opium may be an important drug in the hands of a skilled physician.

And drink . . .

### **Drink at Home.**

Well, there are highly civilised families that make drink a part of the family menu. A cocktail is served to the entire family before dinner. There is wine with the proper course. In summer mint juleps will follow a hot tennis game and precede the evening meal. And I know fine families in which the children, even the little children, are early initiated into civilised drinking. They start by eating the ice out of the julep glass. They are given a little sip of their parents' cocktail. On festive occasions they even get their little glass of sweet wine or beer.

In some nations—wholesome nations— wine is considered to belong on the table with the rest of the normal food. Some countries find in beer their normal beverage, with coffee a sort of feast-day event. I know how surprised I was to discover that in Italy wine was drunk with meals but that when a man and a woman went out to celebrate they sat in a little cafe, preferably on the sidewalk, and drank tiny cups of coffee.

Now, if young people drink at home, I, for one, have little worry about them. When a young man or a young woman declines to take the pledge because beer or wine is served with the family meals, he or she is quite sensible. And he is not likely to develop into a heavy drinker. (It is a great mistake, however, to suppose that among the nations that drink at meals there are no drunkards. That is a hoary fable known to be entirely incorrect.) As a rule, however, home drinking is safe drinking. People who drink with the family and around the family table are not likely to drink too much. And certainly, under those circumstances there is not the slightest danger of temptation following drink.

### **St. Paul.**

St. Paul's often-quoted advice to his beloved young Bishop was to "use a little wine for thy stomach's sake." Poor St. Paul would have been dumbfounded if he had known that his advice would be used as an excuse for men to drink their heads off and their stomachs out of all natural proportions. Clearly, he did not think wine in itself an evil, any more than the dear Lord did when He changed water into the mild, gentle wine that added an extra element of gaiety to the wedding feast of the poor bridal couple at Cana. But St. Paul shrewdly suggested that wine was something of a medicine. And he was smart enough to thrust into the proper place the important adjective little.

### **The Folly of Prohibition.**

I am not fool enough to believe that drinking will ever be controlled by laws. We are still groaning from the effects of that mighty fiasco called prohibition. Liquor was forbidden, so it became exciting. People collected liquor where formerly they collected stamps or old brass. Liquor became romantic, something to be bought on the sly, to be delivered through an outside-the-law arrangement, to be consumed in secrecy, and to be lifted in toasts of damnation to frustrated lawmakers.

The effects of the era of temperance-by-repression were obvious. Women started to drink hard liquor where formerly they had sipped muscatel wine. Youngsters started toting flasks just to prove what lawbreakers and general "hellers" they were. Girls started to sample the fruit of a new kind of forbidden tree. And the gangsters and the racketeers hired squads of bookkeepers to figure out their profits.

Of course, we were promised that when prohibition was repealed people would become very, very sane about it all. They haven't. I can find scarcely any objective observer, whatever his attitude on the subject of drink, who doesn't maintain that more people are drinking more liquor today than during the days of prohibition. The young people did not give up liquor just because it became legal and they could drink without defying the law. And evidently women had developed a taste for drink that lingered on. Muscatel seemed pretty weak and sissy to a taste accustomed to shots of Scotch or bourbon.

### **Self-Regulation.**

The only way in which a nation learns to use liquor correctly is by education of the individuals. England has stern closing laws; these cut down the opportunity for drink, but do not have much effect on drunkenness. New York requires that food be served with drink, a natural and highly commendable custom. But it's positively grotesque to see the food that is ostentatiously placed, not for the use of customers, but for the watchful eyes of the police—the bowls of dusty pretzels on each table, the dishes of potato chips, the standardised lunch on the bars, a lunch that only a slightly drunk person would dare to tackle.

Self-regulation is the way to handle drink. One's own attitude toward liquor is what will in the long run determine its use or its scandalous abuse. I know that. And that is why I am writing as I do. Accuse me of being a fanatic, but do it only on the grounds that I am fanatical in my desire to see young people get all the best and only the best out of life and in my hatred of seeing liquor do to them what I now see it doing to so alarmingly many.

There are, however, just a few facts about alcoholic drinks that nobody has ever denied.

At present drinks are, as I've merely noted before, extremely expensive. When they are not expensive, they are probably very bad and dangerous. Cheap liquor is raw, green, unaged liquor. It may have been bottled without Government inspection. It may actually be rank poison.

## **Alcohol.**

Alcohol taken in small quantities does give an apparent stimulation to a person's perceptions. For a brief time he seems to see more clearly, be more alert. His wit is sometimes more responsive. He is there with the snappy "comeback."

Beyond that point though, he is not nearly so alert. For alcohol is a narcotic. It puts people to sleep. In ancient days it was given to men who were about to be crucified, so that their initial pains would not be so intense. It makes the reactions sluggish. It makes the eyes less perceptive. A man driving an automobile after he has been drinking finds that he does not make the instinctive driving gestures so quickly as he does when he is absolutely sober. That is why so many accidents are caused by slightly intoxicated drivers. They try to do the things they do when sober—slip a car out of gear, bear down on the brake, catch the hand brake—and they do these things perceptibly slowly. The result? Where in a sober state they would have stopped or controlled the car and avoided an accident, with even a little drinking they have been slower by seconds, just enough to cause the delay necessary for an accident.

## **Sleep-Producing.**

So now State and city police give drivers drink tests, not drunk tests. A man may be quite capable of walking a chalk line after he's had two or three drinks, but those drinks have slowed up his reflexes.

He is driving as if he were somewhat under the influence of chloroform. He is partially asleep. His eyes do not gauge distance accurately. His ears are not so keen to catch sound; his brain is not keen to co-ordinate it.

Drink puts a man slightly to sleep. That is just another way of saying that his efficiency is notably lowered.

That is why factory managers are afraid to have drinking men around machinery. Their reactions are slowed down. They get in the way of machines. After even a drink or two they are more likely to hurt themselves and, by misjudging the movement of the machines, to cause hurt to others.

So the bigger and more important the company, the more likely it is not to want drinking men working for it. It objects to having people supposedly on the job when they are really partly asleep, slightly doped. Their brains are not quick. Their hands are likely to fumble. They make mistakes.

But any young man knows just from the effect on his own feet what a deadening, doping effect follows from even a little more than enough liquor.

Another thing that is well known is that a drinking man has a much lowered chance of coming successfully through an operation. Physicians always find out about their patients drinking habits. If those habits are bad, the chances of a successful operation are decidedly less. If the patient is a drinker, the chances are that pneumonia will hit him much harder and his recovery will be more doubtful.

## **The Terrible Habit.**

Everyone knows, of course, that alcoholic drinks are habit-forming. When a man takes a drink of water, he drinks until his thirst is satisfied; then he has finished. That is true of all the so-called soft drinks.

One drinks for the pleasure of the taste or for the quenching of thirst. When that has been taken care of, one is content and does not want any more.

The exact opposite is true of alcoholic drinks. They do not satisfy; they create a demand for more. A man drinks an alcoholic drink to quench his thirst, and he is surprised to find after a short time that he is thirstier than he was before. He takes several drinks, and, far from having his thirst quenched and his taste satiated, he wants to go on and on.

So, after a night of drinking, men wake up with a most terrific thirst. After a lifetime of drinking, a man has a developed thirst that cries constantly to be satisfied. Kipling put that into a famous phrase when he talked of the road to Mandalay as a spot where "a man can raise a thirst."

Now, I've heard that thirst explained by chemists and physiologists in this way: In the cells of our body there is a certain amount of fluid, which is absolutely necessary for our health and our normal living. When a man is dehydrated, when the fluid is dried up, he is a sick man. After enough water or fluid has been dried up, he is doomed to die. Men can get along without food much longer than they can without drink, simply because that fluid is essential for health, for life. Modern medicine advises the drinking of a lot of water and much fruit juice, which contain a great deal of water.

### **Thirst-Creating.**

Now, alcohol is deceptive. It looks like a fluid, but, the chemists explained to me, it doesn't act like a fluid. While it passes the palate with a liquid flow and a pleasant taste (if properly mixed with other elements), it does not pass into the cells to take the place of the fluid needed there.

So when a man drinks water, his thirst is diminished. When he drinks alcohol in any form, he has the brief sensation of quenched thirst, but shortly after that his thirst grows more intense, for the alcohol has actually served to dehydrate him. It has dried up the needed fluid in his cells. As a consequence, when a man is a heavy drinker, he is thirsty all the time. His cells are constantly dry, and every drink he takes dries them up a little more. So, after a time he has to drink constantly, or he is miserable. He discovers that what was once a pleasurable sensation has now become a slave necessity. He has to drink, and then to drink more to overcome the drying out caused by the first drink, and then more and more, until the habit is physiologically tied to him. Drunkards are not cured by any mere strength of will. They are physically sick people. They have acquired a habit that is based on an artificial physical need. Curing them is a long and laborious process, one that is torture to themselves and that demands infinite patience on the part of the medical men who treat them.

And—what is more important—habits of drinking are established early in life. Few, if any, men who start to drink at, say, the age of forty, ever become habitual drunkards. But if a young man has the habit of drink before he is twenty, the chances of his ever recovering are terrifyingly slight.

All this, however, is commonplace, and so well-known that it merely has to be mentioned here for the sake of a certain completeness.

### **Drink and Sex.**

The connection between drinking and sexual immorality is something else that is well-known and yet extremely important to look at in any discussion of young people and drink.

From time immemorial men have put drink and sex sins into adjacent categories. People go out "to get drunk and raise hell." Men have always been fully aware of two important things:

First, that if they drank sufficiently, their sexual passions would inevitably be excited.

Second, that if they could get any woman to drink with them, her resistance to their persuasions would be decidedly lowered.

Often men make themselves drunk because under the influence of drink they sin more boldly and more lustily. They persuade women to become drunk because they know that even slightly drunken women are relatively easy victims.

Now, it is perfectly silly to say that all drinkers are lustful men or that all women who drink are going to be ruined. But the ancient tradition of lust among drinking men has been terribly perpetuated in our modern times. Thousands of young men who have gone out with young women and have drunk a little too much have found their passions slipping beyond control and themselves utterly careless about consequences. Thousands of young women have drunk along with the young men, have felt their moral sense of right and wrong sinking in most surprising fashion, have found themselves becoming amorous and yielding, and have awakened from their semi-stupor to find their virginity gone and themselves facing a ruined future.

### **Temptations Grow Strong.**

Please don't, kindly reader, think that I am drawing on an emotional imagination. This is just plain, cold, hard, bitter fact, the experience of thousands of young people of our day and age.

So it is that today young unmarried couples go out on a party and get drunk. From that point on their sense of decency largely disappears. They are careless about consequences. The law for them vanishes in fumes of drink. They do things of which in their sober moments they would be ghastly ashamed. They go to hell with a silly laugh because they hardly know what they do.

That's why high school crowds drink. Under the influence of drink love-making of an evil sort becomes easy: The boy is passionate; the girl is yielding. When they come out from under the effects of the narcotic—that is what liquor

really is —they look back upon the experiences that have changed horribly the whole course of their life.

When in the old days the temperance lecturers pointed out that drinking and prostitution went hand in hand, they knew what they were talking about. Now, that supposedly decent young men and women have started to drink extensively together the passionate consequences hit right into their own experiences.

### **Folly's Ally.**

Now, God knows that young people have enough problems to face in the normal temptations that surround youth. Why should they increase these problems with the temptations that arise from drinking together? A young man feels enough passionate urges within himself; he shouldn't want to excite these urges through drink. A young woman has to have all the strength in the world to resist the insistence of modern temptations. Why should she want to do things that would make her moral standards looser, that would make her an easier victim for some unscrupulous or aroused male?

Seduction has no more powerful ally than drink.

Passion has no more powerful stimulant than drink.

Virtue has no more deadly enemy than drink.

Rotters and the corrupters of innocence have always known this. They have unscrupulously used their knowledge to increase the number of their victims. It was more or less left to our modern times —to our shame—to bring the deadly passionate effects of drinking into the supposedly better society from which are to come the mothers and the fathers of the future.

I am only sorry that the hesitance one feels in the face of cold print keeps me from saying what I really think and know about all this. Only a priest or a doctor could tell young men and women the lifelong consequences that have followed the taking of one drink too many. Each story is a new tragedy. Each story is as old as the alliance between drink and passion.

### **Future Parents.**

Naturally, anyone who is interested in young people sees them as they really are, the mothers and fathers of the future.

I do not need to go into any details of the horrible thing it is to have a drunken father. Literature and human history have repeated that ghastly story too often. I never see a young man contracting the habit of drink without thinking of his future as a husband. I wonder how many nights his wife will sit up waiting for his hesitant, faltering step on the porch or in the hallway. I wonder how soon it will be before his children will become aware that they have a drunkard for a father. I shudder a little as I realise that some of those children may be conceived in moments of drunken passion or stupor. I think of the jobs he will lose, the professional success he will never attain, the money he will squander, the tears and agony he will cause because early in life he contracted the habit of drink.

"Oh," say you, my fine lad, "that won't happen to me. I can take it or leave it alone."

Forgive my ironic laughter.

There never was a drunkard in the making who didn't use exactly that same chestnut—and seem to believe it. Worse: there never was a drunkard staggering through life who didn't believe that he could stop drinking any time he made up his mind to do so. And all the while the habit was fastening welded chains on him, creating a physical condition with which medical skill would have to struggle, often in vain.

### **And Mothers?**

As for a drunken mother, that is a picture and a possibility we should prefer not to consider. Unfortunately, if young women's drinking continues at its present rate, that possibility will become a terrifying and appalling reality, I should prefer to let you draw your own picture of the children of a mother who is given even occasionally to drink. I would rather not look with you into her home, or into the hearts of her children as they realise their mother's secret or open vice.

"But," I hear you protest, rapidly, "this is certainly the extreme case. Why does he drag out this tremolo stop and get us all emotionally excited over something that won't remotely happen to us?"

It is happening to thousands. It isn't the child of the slums these days who has the drunken mother; it's very likely the child in the country-club house, in the apartment on Park Avenue. It's not the illiterate woman who is the tippler; it's the woman with the college degree and the background that should mean culture and social grace.

But even if you, my good young friends, are not remotely connected with such a possibility, such a possibility exists for others. And because it does, I wanted to present it. Later on I shall come back to it once more.

### **The Old Pledge.**

In the days that happily preceded prohibition there was a custom universal among American Catholics that deserves a nod of recognition. When children were confirmed, they all stood, raised their right hands, and took a solemn pledge to abstain from all intoxicating liquors, including beer, cider, and wine, until they reached the age of twenty-one. That pledge was taken for granted exactly in the same way that vaccination was. In fact, I think it was a sort of spiritual vaccination.

The origins of that pledge go back to the days of the great Father Mathew. (You'll find statues of him all over Ireland.)

### **Father Mathew.**

The crusade of Father Mathew and the work he did for Ireland are truly grand. He arrived at priesthood in the early section of the nineteenth century, to find that drink was the national curse of Ireland. Why this was so is not difficult to understand. Ireland had gone through three hundred years of the most frightful persecution. Sorrow was the lot of the island, and men fled from their sorrows to drink. The "creature" made them forget, at least for a time, the wrongs they were suffering, the poverty that had been blanketed upon them.

In addition, England had made intellectual life difficult by refusing the Irish higher education, except at the cost of their Faith, and had snatched most forms of recreation from the grip of the despised Irish peasant. Drink took the place of other forms of recreation. It briefly awoke the imagination and supplied for the lack of the denied education.

But Father Mathew made war on drink in Ireland. He saw the effect it had on the men. He saw the sorrows it brought to their wives and mothers and children. He counted up the money squandered, the talents wasted. He was shocked that, whatever the excuse, Ireland should be branded with the accusation of drunkenness. He waged his crusade. Hundreds of thousands took the pledge. And when they came to the new land, America, they brought their pledge with them; the pledge at confirmation became the custom of the Church in America.

Father Mathew saw the ravages of drink in his beloved country. For him there was no solution but the complete elimination of drink. He did not meet the evil by appealing for temperance. He wanted total abstinence. That was the only way the horrors of drunkenness and of drink could be killed. Hence his crusade. Hence the pledge.

### **Ireland Today.**

The pledge lapsed in Ireland shortly after his death, and to some extent drink came back into its evil own. But today Ireland has another great crusade, and temperance pioneers by the hundreds of thousands take the pledge of total abstinence, many of them for life. You see them everywhere in Ireland, with the little lapel pin that marks them as pioneers. The vast majority of the young priests have taken this pledge to abstain from intoxicating liquor, and have taken it for life. And the effect on the youth of Ireland has been tremendous.

No half measures there. Drink was an evil. They would strike that evil the powerful blow of an Irishman and a fighter.

Now I am not going directly to ask young Catholics to take any pledge. I took one in my day. My associates did. Not one of us drank. No party we attended ever had the slightest smell of liquor in any form. I know we didn't need it. Yet, from what I know of young people today, I, even though I am no lover of the days that are passed, know that we had a great deal more fun at a great deal less expense than today's young people are having. That, however, is beside the point.

### **The Case.**

Let me state my case, and you can draw your own conclusion.

First of all, it is my contention that young people with anything north of their necklines do not need drink to make possible a good time.

Drink is a social element in some cases; I freely admit that. When people find one another somewhat dull and conversation languishes, when they are physically too tired or creaky to do the energetic things they did as youngsters, then drink may supply a social need. It's a pickup for brains tired from a long day's and a long life's work. It makes conversation sound clever though in reality it may be very dull. It puts a brief and fictitious life into older people's dancing. It stimulates a gaiety to which the oldsters have lost their natural right. I can see the place of liquor, of drink, in the parties of somewhat dull older people.

But young people don't need any artificial stimulant for their social life, not if they are even slightly awake and remotely alive. They love to be together and have a quick flow of conversation and a spontaneous crackling of wit. They dance without growing tired. The party just starts for them about the time when the oldsters are sinking into exhaustion. They are quite as full of pep on lemonade or root beer as their fathers and mothers would be on two strong highballs each. They don't have to build their inner fires; they have to bank them. They don't need something to make them want to get up and sing and dance and take exercise and run the shoes off their feet. They simply don't need alcoholic stimulant.

### **For a Good Time.**

I know this: A crowd of young people have a great deal more fun without drink than they have with it. Without drink they are their own natural, unaffected, robust, vigorous selves. With it they are slightly self-conscious, probably trying to act older than they are, at the very time when they should be delighted to act their age. They become maudlin and sentimental or silly and sticky. Drink is not oil on their wheels; it's wet asphalt into which the party bogs down.

There's this to consider: Really to enjoy a good time, a person needs the full use of his faculties. He should be keen, alive, awake, seeing and hearing everything that goes on, knowing every move, hearing every joke, joining in with every burst of song and laughter. When a young man gets a few drinks in him, he becomes soggy or dull, amorous or belligerent. He starts breaking up the party by wanting to make love to some girl or to fight some boy. He grows stupid and sleepy and silly and annoying. And unless the rest are in the same state, they want to toss him out on his ear.

Besides, when he's under the influence of liquor, how does he know he's having a good time? He's not quite all there. He doesn't catch the jokes. He misses what's going on. He's slightly sleepy. He's very much doped. The party swirls around him in a hazy blur. He's there, but not quite all there. He's in the crowd, but he's almost "all in."

### **Not Needed.**

For the life of me I can't see how a man or a woman under the influence of the narcotic that is alcohol can think he or she is having as good a time as has the person who has the full use of his senses.

Nobody has ever enjoyed life more than I have, I honestly believe. And I've never needed the inner glow called alcohol to make that good time possible.

Why should you need it, you who are young and full of life, with keen senses that need no stimulant and resent a drug?

I repeat: The best times that young people ever have are completely without intoxicants. I know. My own experience tells me that. What young people admit in their moments of real honesty tells me that. And your experience bears me out.

### **Are You Leaders?**

But there is another angle on all this, and I think a fine young Catholic will see it clearly. Drink is doing a world of harm today. Everybody admits that. Young people are loudest in confessing the facts. All right, then; someone has to make a start toward correcting that evil. Prohibition failed. Any attempt to establish laws to outlaw drink will simply

meet the fate of that last bitter experiment.

What can be done?

It all boils down to the same old thing— the example of a few brave, fine individuals.

I honestly believe that most Catholic young people are temperate. They know that they don't need drink for their good times. They don't go around to taverns expecting to find in that dank, dreary, smelly atmosphere a good time. They are not the drunkards of the future.

So really drink means little to their young lives, thank God. They can take it or leave it alone. Then why not, for the sake of the weak, leave it alone? If the example of young Catholics drinking lemonade in a crowd that is becoming slightly fuzzy with inferior Scotch and soda would be valuable—and surely it would—why not give that example? If we could prove to the young world that alcohol merely gets in the way of young people in their effort to have a good time, wouldn't that be a valuable demonstration? Why should we refuse the relatively easy sacrifice needed to be totally abstemious in a world where young people are rushing crazily to taverns and night clubs and roadhouses and are fogging their young brains with bad liquor and endangering their whole future for the sake of a few drinks that may bring on a habit destructive of life itself?

### **Setting the Standard.**

Catholic young people and, in general, all good, decent young people, live surrounded by boys and girls that are imperiled in body and soul by drink. Drinking temperately won't impress these endangered youths. If you drink at all, then they have the only justification they want to drink their silly heads off. But if they know that any sizeable body of young people don't drink, they'll stop and think. If they know that these fine young people don't drink, not because of any law or any compulsion placed on them by others, but because they think they don't need it and are sure that it might do them harm, the weaker ones might get the strength to follow that example.

A crowd of young people go out for an evening; one of them has the frank courage to order soft drinks. Inevitably that has an effect on the others. If he's a fine young man, a leader in every way, that effect is marked and lasting. If she's a fine young girl, the mere fact that she refuses hard liquor may give other girls in the crowd courage to do the same. I've known young men and young women who had just that courage. I know that the effect they had was magnificent.

Liquor among young people is a terrible evil today. It's silly to pretend that it isn't. It will do the whole future terrible harm. If we oldsters start preaching, you youngsters will grow irritated, and a lot of the hot young rebels will take that as their cue to show to us that nobody is going to boss them around. If the evils result in legislation—as they stand a good show of doing—young people will start kicking the law around again.

Anyhow, young people admit that they can handle their own affairs. Here's an affair they'll be smart to handle, and handle swiftly and adequately.

So what happens to the present generation depends upon the present generation. Someone has to start being strong. Someone has to give up the distinctly unimportant and very expensive luxury that is drink. Some one has to prove that young people don't need drink in order to have a good time. Someone has to show that he is keenly aware of the perils of drink to people of his age. Who better than Catholics, who have all the grace and strength that are theirs plus their admitted responsibility to set a good example to others?

### **Scandal.**

There's another angle on this that I cannot fail to notice. We Catholics, rightly or wrongly, are thought of as having the habit of drinking to excess. "The good old Catholic vice of drunkenness," someone sneeringly called it. Well, Protestantism has regarded drinking as a horrible sin. Protestants have pointed the finger of scorn at drunken Catholics; because of the single drunken Catholic they happened to know, they have turned away from all of us. Their viewpoint is unfair. But we are not likely to impress them with the glory of truth and the beauty of our faith if they see us indulging to excess in drink or even drinking just for the good time we think we get out of it.

St. Paul said that if the fact that he ate meat was cause of scandal to anyone he would not eat meat. If we have anything of his apostolic spirit, we will realise that, false though the inferences may be, the drinking of some Catholics

keeps some very good and sincere Protestants from even considering the claims of the Church. We can do our little part to eliminate that barrier in their way to the full truth.

### **A Noble Motive.**

But it was the really great Father Reiner, of Loyola University, in Chicago, who thought of a motive for abstaining from drink that, it seems to me, should touch every young Catholic's heart. He merely pointed to the figure of Christ on the Cross and recalled that moment when He cried out, "I thirst."

We know what that cry meant. We know that on the Cross Christ suffered for every type of sin. If thirst racked His tortured body, it was because of the awful sins of drunkenness that have marked the sordid progress of drink through man's history.

The crimes of drunkenness and the crimes that follow because of drunkenness caused the awful thirst of Christ upon Calvary. The cry of the incurable drunkard was in His sacred throat. The torture of body cells sucked dry, a torture that follows drunkenness, was His. And He suffered new and acute agony because He was carrying in His own sacred person the multiplied sins that are the results of drink.

### **Youth's Response.**

We owe Christ, Father Reiner quietly said, reparation for that awful moment of His agony. How can we best repay that debt? The answer is obvious—by giving up the dangerous and totally unnecessary indulgence in drink. We make our abstinence a glorious sacrifice offered to the thirsting Christ. Our renunciation eases the agony of His thirst even as He looked from Calvary down through the ages and saw the multiplied crimes associated with drunkenness. He saw the splendid young Catholic man and woman giving up drink for His sake, and the horror of that divine thirst was lessened.

Father Reiner's plea had its effect. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young men, agreed to make that relatively easy offering to the dying Christ. They held their act of renunciation to the lips of the thirsting Saviour, knowing how gratifying it would be to His parched throat. They could not permit themselves to be responsible for Christ's cry, a cry brought on by sins of drinking. They did their important bit to ease the thirst of their beloved master.

The increase of drunkenness in this country is a mounting peril. The perils that drink holds are frightening even youth itself.

Temperance is not enough. We need heroic steps. Youth boasts that it is naturally heroic.

Can youth in this most important case be as heroic as the importance of the issue demands?

I believe that youth can. But it is the thirsting Christ who waits for their response.

Nihil obstat:

J. DONOVAN,

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