

SEX IN PRISON

What do prisoners do about sex?

Of all the phases of penology, this question is probably one of the least discussed when penologists exchange ideas at conventions and meetings. Yet we do know that sexual deprivation can have an even more lasting effect on the prisoner than bad food, ill treatment, or lack of recreation.

When George Bernard Shaw wrote that "imprisonment as it exists today is a worse crime against the prisoner than any crime the prisoner commits against society," he had in mind the tortuous experience of going for 5, 10, 15 years — and often longer — without a woman.

Sexual deprivation is a hundred times harder to bear in the prison atmosphere than elsewhere.

The prison newcomer who is determined to stay normal will find many obstacles in

his path. For one thing, every prison has a large number of homosexuals who go about forming alliances without shame or reticence.

We must always keep in mind, too, that most of the young men behind bars are at their physical peak, when the sexual urge is highest. In a typical year, for example, 58 per cent of the inmates of state and federal institutions averaged 34 years of age.

As the months go on, the prisoner will find the absence of women more and more difficult to bear. Occasionally, an inmate will adjust himself to these new conditions intelligently, by sublimating his energies. One man for instance, a banker serving five years for embezzlement, recalls that he would become frantic in the long evenings in his cell, especially from 6 to 9 p.m., when he had nothing to do but think

of the woman he left behind him.

After the lights went out, he couldn't sleep and spent half the night tossing. Like many other prisoners, he resorted to masturbation for satisfaction. As a temporary form of relief this practice may not be harmful to the individual who has some immediate prospects of a natural sex life. But to the prisoner, the practice can come to mean more than a substitute, and the accompanying fantasies harmful in later years.

When the banker became a chronic masturbator and found that the practice was undermining his self-confidence and health, he decided to abandon it. With the aid of the warden he worked out the following program which kept him busy every waking moment:

From 8 till 5 he worked in a secretarial capacity in the prison office. At 5, he played catch in the prison yard. After he had supper he went to the prison school and taught till bedtime at 9, then went to bed utterly exhausted.

The banker recognized from the outset that his attempts to forget about his wife would not be made easier by the fact that most prisoners talked about sex 95 per cent of the time. He therefore gathered about him four or five friends who agreed to mention the subject amongst themselves as infrequently as possible.

Thus this banker managed to get through his five years and retain a fairly normal sexual outlook.

The average prisoner, however, as long as he maintains his heterosexuality, will strive for a more satisfying solution to his sex problem. He will seek every attempt to establish contact with the opposite sex.

This is relatively simple if he works his way up to the position of "trusty" and is allowed to go on messages outside the prison walls. More than one trusty has arranged for his wife to move near the prison where he could visit her on his official trips outside.

Dr. Harry Elmer Barnes, one of America's best known penologists, once wrote that "if one were consciously to

plan an institution perfectly designed to promote sexual degeneracy he would create the modern prison."

For it is a fact that the vast majority of inmates, failing to adjust their lives to a womanless society, will resort to sex practices which are unacceptable to society.

Many prominent penologists believe that we must change our viewpoint regarding sex in prison. "We still think unyieldingly," he writes, "that the prisoner should not have even the slightest experience of a normal sex life."

At present, our program for keeping a prisoners' family from breaking up is to allow him a visit from his wife, usually with a screen wall between them, once or twice a month. But does this satisfy a man after months and years of privation?

Other countries have been realistic about the prisoner's sex problems and have made bold innovations.

In Salvador, for example, wives are allowed to see their husbands in a private room for one hour each week. Before a woman is allowed to enter the prison, she is care-

fully searched for contraband.

"The law may deny prisoners their liberty," says the cabinet minister who introduced the reform, "but it does not deny them their rights as men."

This system has had beneficial effects. Moral conditions in the penitentiary have noticeably improved and a larger proportion of prisoners' families have been kept together.

In Mexico, a variation of the same system is in use. Married men in Mexico City may receive overnight visits from their wives and are given special quarters away from the cell block for that purpose.

Russia has her own way of avoiding the process of sexual degeneracy which results when men are locked up alone for long periods. Prisoners who prove themselves worthy are graduated from one institution to another and are given greater freedom each time.

Some of the senior institutions are located right in the middle of collective farms. Here, the prisoners work the fields with the peasants and

share in the profits. As members of these agricultural penal institutions, they have almost as many rights as a free citizen and the sex problem simply disappears.

Regarding other prisons, the prisoner is given an annual vacation of 14 days, which he can spread out to monthly visits to his home.

Family life is recognized by the Soviet authorities as one of the greatest incentives the inmate has for wanting to go straight and it is encouraged in every way.

Joseph F. Fishman sees no reason why we cannot adopt a modified vacation plan for the inmates of American institutions. He suggests that a certain number of married men, who have proven themselves dependable, be allowed out periodically to see their wives. Similarly, he feels that there would be definite advantages to both society and the prisoner if a carefully chosen minority of unmarried inmates also be given furloughs.

LINCOLN CORRECTS HIMSELF

Abraham Lincoln, as a young lawyer, was pleading two cases the same day before the same judge.

Both of these cases involved the same principle of law, but in one he appeared for the defendant, in the other he spoke for the plaintiff.

In the morning he made an eloquent plea and won his case. In the afternoon he took the opposite side and was arguing with the same earnestness. The judge, with a half smile, inquired as to the cause of his change in attitude.

"Your honor," said Lincoln. "I may have been wrong this morning, but I know I'm right this afternoon." — *Mrs. Nina F. Rice.*