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MALINGERING AMONG CRIMINALS.

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One of the most characteristic phases of the psychology of the criminal is his tendency to malingering. Physicians who have had experience with large bodies of men find that their labors are greatly increased by cases of pretended illness of various kinds. Nowhere is the burden of differential diagnosis between real and assumed illness so great as it is within the walls of prisons. The inexperienced physician who takes charge of a penal institution finds it impossible at first to do the work which devolves upon him, on account of the large number of inmates who pretend illness. It requires considerable knowledge of human nature, and somewhat prolonged experience in institutional work to enable one to avoid, on the one hand, the impositions placed upon him by malingerers, and, on the other hand, the danger of injustice to those who are really ill. The prison physician who assumes that all convicts who report to him for treatment are really ill will be overburdened with care. He who goes to the opposite extreme will work great cruelty and injustice to those who are really ailing. The prison physician, even when he has had considerable experience, is quite as likely to make mistakes in diagnosis as physicians outside of prisons—and no one claims that they are infallible. As a matter of principle, it is better to be deceived by a dozen malingerers than to allow a single bona fide invalid to go without proper care. The prison physician is a powerful factor for good or evil. He exerts a humanizing influence upon his charges such as no one else possibly can. The milk of human kindness is not always thrown away upon the convict, and nothing makes him more rebellious than to feel that common humanity is denied him.

Malingering on the part of criminals is usually attributed to a desire to escape work. This may be the explanation of many cases, but it certainly is not a sufficient explanation for all. Work under proper conditions and within reasonable limits is welcome to perhaps the majority of prison inmates, who welcome it as a relief from the deadly monotony and stagnation of prison life, which in the absence of systematic occupation must necessarily prevail. There are few convicts,

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indeed, who do not realize that suitable occupation is better for them physically than idleness.

The records of prison management have shown the necessity of engaging convicts in employment of various kinds. Prior to the introduction of labor in prisons a very large proportion of convicts went insane within a comparatively short period.

My experience leads me to believe that the malingering of convicts is in itself a manifestation of incapacity—of a lack of physical and moral fiber. The unstable nervous equilibrium of the criminal results in a craving for sympathy, and a craving more particularly for diversion from the monotony of prison life. The sick call is an event in his life, and he swallows the most nauseous doses with gusto. No treatment is severe enough to dissuade him from malingering. The intensification of the ego on the part of the criminal is a further explanation, in that it leads him to believe himself an object of solicitude, or, at least, of interest on the part of others. He has also the idea that the rough places in his prison career will be smoothed in proportion as he excites the sympathy of those about him.

Criminals who are denied stimulants and tobacco sometimes find in drugs a gastronomic novelty which seems to them something that is greatly to be desired. In many instances malingering is due to hypochondriasis pure and simple, the patient being in no wise different from the hypochondriac of respectable life seen in private practice, who suffers from imaginary ailments and who has acquired a taste for drugs. Dr. Dyvet of the Animosa penitentiary believes that many malingerers in prisons are simply individuals with the patent medicine habit, who have fallen in the toils of the law, and who desire to continue titillating their palates with drugs.

There is a class of convicts who are desirous of having surgical operations of various kinds performed, for the relief of deformities, unsightly scars, etc. In some instances the patient is merely responding to his desire for sympathy and an opportunity to lay up in a hospital, where he will be taken care of. In others, and this class comprises perhaps the majority of cases, he merely wishes to rid himself of marks of identification.

The change of diet and relative ease of hospital life impel some convicts to feign illness. One of the prime factors in the encouraging of malingering is the custom which prevails in prisons of dispensing "soft" positions to favorites among the convicts. Without any difficulty whatever the warden can usually secure the assignment of a convict, to one whom, for reasons best known to himself, he desires to be especially kind, to the hospital, where possibly he is kept during the entire term of his

G. FRANK LYDSTON

sentence. On the other hand convicts who are not used to hard work and who lack "pull," are sometimes assigned work which is little less than slow death for them. I have known men who were at work in the stone-yard to deliberately smash their fingers and toes with the setting maul, for the purpose of being sent to the hospital. One man sacrificed his fingers in this way so frequently that I finally, through sheer pity, allowed him to remain permanently in the hospital.

Malingering is a very difficult thing to cure. I finally succeeded, in my prison service, in a way which may suggest itself as practical to other prison physicians. I had tried nauseous doses and the dark cell for months in vain. I finally hit upon the expedient of having the sick call sounded at dinner time. The success of the experiment was astounding, as evidenced by the fact that, whereas 180 men appeared at sick call the day previous, there were only twelve in line on the first day of the experiment. The latter number is about the average number that presented themselves during the rest of my term of service. As my orderly expressed it, they couldn't "stand the smell of the soup."