

The Bet

Study Questions

1. What events lead up to making of the bet in this story? Do you find such a bet believable? What does the author gain by stating that the bet is wild and ridiculous?

A. It was a dark autumn night; the banker had invited many people at the party in his house. Among these people were many journalist and educated men. There was a heating conversation about which is more moral capital punishment or imprisonment for life. They disapproved of the death penalty. The banker had an opinion that capital punishment is better than imprisonment for life because the death sentence kills the victim quicker rather than dragging out the process. A twenty-five year old lawyer at the party responds, saying, he would choose the life sentence to be more moral because any life is better than no life at all. Hearing this response cause the banker to bet the lawyer two million dollars that the lawyer cannot last five years in solitary confinement. The lawyer accepts the wager (bet), but pushes it to fifteen years in hope of making a point.

2. Trace the effects on the lawyer's mind from year to year. What mental processes in the lawyer are hinted at as the bases for changes in his reading and other habits?

A. The effects were:

1. For the first year of his confinement, the prisoner suffered severely from loneliness and depression.
2. In the second year, piano was silent in the lodge, and the prisoner asked only for classics.
3. In the fifth year music was audible again, and the prisoner asked for wine. All that year he spent doing nothing but eating and drinking and lying on his bed, yawning and angrily talking to himself. He didn't read books, sometimes at night he was writing and at the morning he was crying.
4. In the second half of the sixth year, the prisoner began zealously languages, philosophy, and history. He threw himself eagerly into these studies-so much.
5. In the course of four years some six hundred volumes were procured at his request.

6. After the tenth year, the prisoner sat immovably at the table reading nothing but the Gospel.
7. In the last two years of his confinement the prisoner read an immense quantity of books.

3. Why does the lawyer finally reject the money and escape before he becomes entitled to it?

- A. Because he realized that human life is more valuable than money and also he wants to prove that the banker was right when he said capital punishment is more moral than imprisonment for life.

4. Do you think there is any connection between the bet and the deterioration of the banker's character? Explain.

- A. Yes, there was a connection because both of them are wasting money.

5. Do you agree that the voluntary imprisonment is worse than enforced imprisonment?

- A. Voluntary confinement is a great deal harder to bear than compulsory. The thought that you have the right to step out in liberty at any moment will poison.