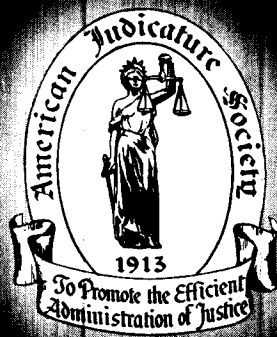


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## Irrevocable Judgments

THE STARKWEATHER EXECUTION has given us another spectacle of capital punishment in action. One benefit is certain—this man will never kill again. But the people of Nebraska could have gained that assurance by better means than committing the same ghastly act for which Starkweather was punished.

A letter from a prison inmate seriously contends that the death penalty is preferable to life imprisonment. He paints a tragic picture of the forgotten "lifer" for whom no mail ever comes, waiting for death. Actually many lifers have been set free, on parole or on proof of their innocence. But in any event, the prisoner's interests are second to those of society as a whole. A society which forbids the taking of human life should set the example and abide by its own command.

All human beings, including judges, make mistakes, and all judicial systems provide the means for their correction. Most executions like Starkweather's take place only after numerous appeals have been taken and denied. But mistakes sometimes come to light only after a lapse of years. A system which permits the imposition of an irrevocable penalty, rendering impossible the subsequent correction of a judicial mistake, deprives every citizen of the full measure of the rights that ought to be his under the criminal law.