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That Herman Webster Mudgett, better known as H. H. Holmes, was a criminal *par excellence* is beyond doubt, but how far and in what respects he was a degenerate, in the accepted sense of the term, is worthy of serious consideration.

Few criminals have received more public attention, but despite this, many essential details of his history are wanting. Very little has been stated as to his heredity. He claims to have come from a respectable New England stock and to have been religiously and carefully brought up. As a boy he does not appear to have been a scapegrace, and no criminal charge is there on record against him. He married at 18 or 20 and commenced the study of medicine at Burlington, Vt. From there he went to the University of Michigan, where he claims to have graduated in medicine in 1884.

According to his own account, after graduating he taught school and practiced medicine in New Jersey for about a year, but it would appear that before this he had already, with a confederate, conspired to defraud life insurance companies, an industry he never entirely abandoned and which finally brought him to the gallows.

Just when he assumed the name of H. H. Holmes is not certain, but probably not long after this. He himself says it was done when he went before the Illinois Pharmacy Board in 1886. From that time he has been known by that name and under it started in business as a druggist in the outskirts of Chicago, where he went into rather extensive and complicated
transactions, chiefly of a crooked character. He managed, however, to keep in fair standing with his neighbors, and at one time was actively interested in church and religious matters.

During this time he had abandoned his New Hampshire wife and child, and without divorce, married in 1887 a Miss Belknap. Some years later in the same way he married a Miss Yoke in Denver under the name of Henry Mansfield Howard. He is supposed also to have contracted another bigamous marriage with Minnie Williams (one of his supposed victims). Beside these he had irregular relations with other women. In 1894, shortly before his final arrest for the murder of Pitzel, he revisited his old home and lived as husband for a few days with his first wife, to whom he told a romantic fiction anent his absence.

Between 1886 and 1894 there is no full account of his doings. They included an extensive series of swindles and forgeries. His transactions covered many parts of the country. He ranged from Canada to Texas and Colorado, often in trouble but generally managing in some way to escape the most serious consequences of his crimes. These were in their way often remarkable for their boldness and impudence. He negotiated for the sale to a gas company of a gas-making machine which was actually running on gas stolen from the company's own mains. He admits "deals of a somewhat similar nature."

While his confessions, generally, have been unreliable, it is probable that the above is safely inside the truth. He was emphatically a man of affairs, but his business transactions were so shady in their nature that the obscurity that enveloped them has been dispersed as yet only to give a glimpse such as the above.

It was during this period that he built his celebrated castle, with its secret chambers and passages, dark rooms, trapdoors, etc. Here he employed the female type-writers and other employes whose mysterious disappearance has done so much to make his popular reputation as a murderer. As far as this crime is concerned it must be admitted that the evidence against him is altogether circumstantial, his confessions and statements being notoriously and boastfully mendacious, in the main. Out of the twenty-seven murders he admitted in his latest confession shortly before his execu-
"stiffs" and a defrauder of life insurance companies his operations were often enough suggestive of murders, even if these were not often committed.

The history of the Pitzel case, where it appears he made away with his confederate and then later with three of his children, and seemed to be planning the deaths of the widow and remaining family, distributing the deaths about the country in such a way as to avoid suspicion, must be fresh in the mind of the reader.

Holmes in his personal appearance, like Wainwright (whom he much resembled in his criminal career), presented nothing specially repulsive in his appearance. He was quiet, mild in manner and voice, fairly well educated, neat in dress and could pass anywhere for a respectable business or professional man. During his long criminal career he appears to have had no particular ambition, except to succeed in his crooked operations and to ingratiate himself with women, for whom he seems to have had a more than normal inclination.

Mentally, there was no lack of acuteness. The fact that he managed to escape justice so long is evidence of this. When he was finally arrested his behavior was peculiar and shifty. He told contradictory stories, and when his case came to trial he dismissed his lawyers and insisted on managing his own defense. Though he showed some aptness in examining witnesses, he was finally obliged to recall his counsel and give the case into his hands. The jury found him guilty almost without leaving the box. Perhaps the one witness whose testimony was most convicting was his latest bigamous wife.

In this he reports the details of twenty-seven murders and claims that he was a case of acquired moral idiocy; that he presented numerous facial stigmata of degeneracy that had grown upon him, during his criminal career. Eighteen of the twenty-seven victims in this confession are living. Its author acknowledged its falsity within a day or two of its appearance.

It was not merely criminal vanity that prompted it, for he received for it a very substantial compensation of several thousand dollars. Throughout his imprisonment, his acquisitiveness was shown in this and other publications for which he received money, and in propositions of blackmail for persons he contemplated involving in these confessions.

While in Philadelphia, Jan. 30, 1896, I had the opportunity of making a careful physical examination of H. H. Holmes, with the following results:

The subject was a 35 year old American, 5 feet 7 inches in height, weighing 150 pounds. The occiput was asymmetrical and prominent, the bregma sunken and the left side of the forehead was more prominent than the right which was sloping. The hair was brown, and on body and face excessive. The face was arrested in development. The zygoma was arrested and hollowed on the right side.

The pictures of Holmes published in the daily papers and in his book, do not, to my mind, portray the features of the man as I saw him in his cell. Figure 1, comes the nearest as he appeared when I saw him. His face was cleanly shaven, except mustache, very thin and much emaciated, presenting the appearance of being in a decline, due perhaps to confinement and a tendency to consumption. He had a cough, and the chances are if he had been allowed to remain in confinement he would have succumbed to tuberculosis.

Figures 2 and 3 show the antero-posterior and lateral shape of head. The right ear was lower than the left. The nose was long and very thin; stenosis of nasal bone very marked. The septum deflected to left, nose to the right. The thyroid gland was arrested. Strab-
ismus in left eye, inherited. The left higher than the right. Slight protruding of the upper jaw; arrest of lower. The mouth on the left side drops lower than on the right. The width, outside of first molars was 2. Width outside first bicuspids 1.62. Height of vault, 63.

Figures 4 and 5 upper and lower jaw. The alveolar process was normal with the exception of the process about the second molar on right side which was hypertrophied. The teeth were normal in size and shape, the third molar undeveloped.

Marked pigeon breast, left side more prominent than right. Chest arrested with tendency to tuberculosis.

Arms: Right normal. Left one and one-half inches longer. He was right handed. His legs were long and thin. The tibia flattened. The feet medium in size but markedly deformed. Depression on left side of skull at bregma, said to be due to fall of brick at age of 30. Sexual organs unusually small.

The jaws were unusually long as compared with the width, with a semi-saddle arch on the left side of the upper jaw. The molars of the lower jaw and left upper had been extracted in early life. The hypertrophy of the alveolar process, the want of development of the third molars and the general abnormal development certainly display a very unstable nervous system in his early life.

In twenty years' experience, I have never observed a more degenerate being from a physical standpoint. Holmes in his confession published, stated that ten years ago he was examined by four men of marked ability and by them pronounced mentally and physically normal and healthy. “To-day, I have every attribute of a degenerate a moral idiot.” Is it possible that the crimes, instead of being the result of these abnormal conditions, are, in themselves, the occasion of degeneracy? . . . within the past few months these defects have increased with startling rapidity; as is made known to me by each succeeding examination,” etc.

Holmes was examined ten years ago, not to ascertain stigmata but for life insurance, and the Bertillon system was not used at all since only criminals are thus examined, for identification. When these examinations are made, only one arm, finger and part of the body are measured, and not both sides for comparison.

While I was making my examination, I called his attention to a number of deformities which he was not aware he possessed.

Being a medically educated man, he certainly should have been better acquainted with these malformations, but he had evidently given this subject little attention since he was quite ignorant of the cause of two most marked deformities: The too deep depressions in the left frontal and occipital region of the head. These he claimed were due to a brick falling upon him at the age of 30. The marked deformity of the chest walls he claimed to be due to pneumonia.

Both deformities were stigmata of degeneracy. Holmes, since his confinement, had no doubt lost flesh, which made these deformities appear more prominent. That they had developed as a result of his criminal tendencies is perfectly absurd. They must have developed with the osseous system, which would be complete by the 26th year; nor will acromegaly account for them.
Holmes has been called an extraordinary criminal, but he certainly was no more of a criminal than Wainwright, who was well known in his time as an essayist and better as a forger and murderer. From the standpoint of literary and artistic culture Wainwright stood higher than Holmes. Like Holmes, he attempted to defraud insurance companies and there is no doubt he poisoned a girl for this purpose. Holmes' habitual criminality was modified by his education and antecedents. He had sufficient ability and self-control to successfully pass for a respectable citizen and to keep his criminal transactions so distributed as to territory and covered that only the self-interested perseverance of a life insurance company prompted by a hint from an ex-prison acquaintance could reveal them. His mental defects, so far as they existed, seem to have been confined to his moral sensibilities. He apparently had none of that sense of moral dictation which is a part of the constitution of every normal individual. He acted entirely as an egotist, perfectly capable of appreciating the possible immediate consequences of his acts and more than ordinarily expert in managing in one way or another in avoiding them, but utterly lacking in even the utilitarianism commonly expressed in the old adage that honesty is the best policy. While the murders have mainly created his popular reputation, they were but incidents in his consistent criminal career. He had no regard for others' rights or lives. Doing away with a mistress or a confederate when she or he become inconvenient was an easy matter to him. His education, his dissecting-room training and subsequent specialty helped to remove original superstitious fears that might restrain the average criminal. He seems to have been utterly lacking in any lasting or sincere affection or attachment. A man who could deliberately desert successively two wives with their children would be capable of abandoning others whose relations were less intimate.


Havelock Ellis remarks that whatever refinement or tenderness of feeling criminals attain to reveals itself in what we should call sentiment or sentimentality. One of the characteristics of Wainwright's essays is their sentimentality. Himself, when in prison, he described as the possessor of "a soul whose nutriment is love, its offspring art, music, divine song and still holier philosophy." This sentimentality cropped up in Holmes in the letters to his first wife whose pathetic nature so impressed his counsel. It was also shown in his successes with women.

His crimes were apparently all deliberate and cold-blooded. In his arrangement of his building, "The Castle," he made provisions for various kinds of crooked work. Only in this way can be reasonably explained this seemingly crazy piece of architecture. There is no evidence in his record that Holmes was insane in any way except it be morally.

In his apparent disregard for human life he was less peculiar than would at first sight seem. When a man has an object in view, which to him is a supreme motive, nothing will stand in his way. Holmes had no regard for the law if he could avoid its punishments, no conscientious scruples to govern his conduct. The taking of life was no more to him than to the Sultan of Turkey, a hanging judge or a

2 The Criminal, p. 152.
military commander, who will sacrifice a forlorn hope to gain an advantage. It is not so improbable, therefore, that he may have been a more or less wholesale murderer, if he found people in his way. He may have disposed of his victims and regarded it only as an inconvenient necessity. There is nothing in his character to make this intrinsically improbable.

Holmes was certainly a degenerate physically, as the numerous stigmata he bore proved, but he was not more of one than many moral men and good citizens. There was, with the defects, undoubtedly a certain defectiveness and want of balance of the nervous system, but it can not be said that this necessitated the career he chose. If he were a "born criminal" it was not evident till after he had passed his minority and his moral imbecility did not apparently reveal itself to any very striking extent during his boyhood. He followed the course of many young men, who, on leaving the associations and restraints of home fall into evil courses, only he went farther and under pressure, it may be of want and misfortune, adopted to the fullest extent the anti-social and aberrant career of a criminal. There was, possibly, always a certain defect in his moral constitution which was checked in its effects by the restraints and training of his earlier years and might have been overcome entirely had his will been directed into proper paths. His case seems to be largely, if not altogether one of acquired moral obtuseness, not of complete congenital moral insanity. How far he was handicapped morally by his constitution, is a question that can not be decided absolutely, but probably not more than the average criminal, who is generally of a more or less degenerate type.

It has been assumed that his vanity and egotism were excessive and evidence of his abnormal mental constitution. First, however, it ought to be proven that these existed to any such extent as is inferred. This can not well be done from his history. He was not obtrusive in his manner and his very choice of
life made it impolitic, to say the least, to such publicity, and in his way he was very politic. He had ample confidence in himself, as was shown by his attempting his own defense. This may be taken as evidence of egotism, but he can hardly be said to have been obtrusively egotistic. His numerous statements in regard to himself were apparently not so much prompted by vanity as by a desire to make a profit from them. This was especially true of his last noted confession, which was one of the best remunerated productions of fiction based on fact that has been brought out in the country.

There was certainly one striking psychologic peculiarity about the man; lying seemed to come naturally to him. He did it sometimes apparently without object. In this, however, he was not altogether unique, but there are marked examples, never in their acts passing over the line of legality.

Summing up the character of Holmes, we would say that he was, first of all, a swindler, a chevalier d'industrie and a roue. Money and women seemed to be his objects in life, especially the former, and he was perfectly unscrupulous in his methods of gratifying his ruling passions. His professional and general education, which he seems never after the first failure to have attempted to utilize properly, only served to make him the more dangerous and probably aided to make him a murderer as well as a seducer, bigamist, forger and thief. He may have had some congenital deficiency in his moral make-up, but the absolute lack of moral dictation of his later life, was due to or greatly aggravated by his self-chosen environments.