

Another issue of SPY RAY is here, if indeed it is...I spent too much time doing research and like that for this article and I'm going to have to airmail this to Pelz if it's to get distributed in the mailing at all. Operation Crifanac CCXXIX, and this, though not other crimes dealt with herein, must be admitted to be:

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Eney's Fault
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FUNDAMENTAL, MY DEAR WATSON The records of the exploits of Mr. Sherlock Holmes have yielded much information to exegetes and analysts of all degrees of erudition and fields of interest -- as, I suppose, is only to be expected from a series of detailed records of life in Victorian-Edwardian times. There have been even a couple of hc collections of such Sherlockiana, and youall probably know of the recent biography by W.S. Baring-Gould which drew many data from such writings -- Holmes' own The Whole Art of Detection being held up in press by those bunglers at Clarkson Potter. Indeed, just the other day SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (issue of 5 June) had a capital, tho brief, article on Holmes' accomplishments as a sportsman.

Most of this exegesis, however, has concerned details of period life, chronology, and biographical reconstruction. I think that it's also possible to reconstruct something that -- to my skimpy knowledge -- has not engaged the attention of the analysts: namely, his general theories of criminology.

Though Holmes did not enter practice as a detective until 1877, he read intensively in the field of theory & practice of crime for several years before this. Being proficient in both French and Italian, he could have become familiar with the early works -- not translated into English for years -- of Gabriel Tarde and Cesare Lombroso. Of course, the speculations of the so-called Classical School were open to him since this set of doctrines was largely of English origin and, indeed, was still the dominant theoretical basis for criminology in England. Available also was the work of Galt and of various other writers, not specifically oriented toward the problem of crime, like Darwin and Marx.

Leftist ideas, of course, were rejected by Holmes; only note how many of his cases involved attempts to maintain or defend social position. The Classical School is incompatible with the doctrines of so-called Criminal Anthropology; I believe that if we can establish Holmes' acceptance of the latter, his rejection of the former follows.

Now, the Classical School is a set of doctrines explaining and "dealing with" crime in the most extreme manner of Lockean empiricism -- which is about what one would expect of anything Jeremy Bentham had a hand in. Its solution is to make the pain of punishment just exceed the pleasure of successful crime, which will then cease to exist. (There is a certain amount of truth in this, mind you, if the punishment follows both promptly and inevitably.) The necessary premise is that criminal acts are arrived at by reasoning from information.

Criminals, then, are reasonable beings and just like other men, barring the temptations they're exposed to.

Criminal Anthropology -- as it is now called; originally Lombroso wanted to call it Criminal Sociology(1) -- is incompatible with the Classical School because it rejects this premise. Lombroso, studying physical characteristics of criminals, found data that led him to conclude that criminals were different from non-criminals in ways that included grossly evident variations in the physical makeup -- the so-called "stigmata of crime". Persons possessing these stigmata are atavisms, and will commit crime when they have the chance, rather than being brought to it by circumstances. (Betcha didn't know why Gernsback-era stf so often showed futuremen referring to "atavists" where we'd say "criminals", hm?) Criminality is a primitive and bestial trait, and primitive and bestial men will commit crimes as naturally as breathing. Thus crime is not merely non-rational but isn't even voluntary; it's basically a consequence of hereditary defects. I may say that this notion has been pretty thouroughly exploded; Lombroso himself backed down on it eventually. The strongest influence of heredity most moderns will grant is that hereditary handicaps may be included in the various causes which lead to some crimes.

We can be sure that Holmes did subscribe to large parts of the theory of Criminal Anthropology. His interest in physical measurements is indicated by his contributions to the literature: Upon Tattoo Marks (tattooing is specifically cited by Lombroso as one of his stigmata, being a barbaric trait), The Influence of a Trade Upon the Form of the Hand, "On the Variability of Human Ears", and the various deductions from physical characteristics in "The Book of Life". He expressed "enthusiastic admiration" for Bertillon's system of recording physiques(2), and nearly lost his temper when Dr. James Mortimer suggested that the French criminologist was a greater expert than Holmes himself(3). Indeed, Holmes more than once plainly stated an inheritance theory of criminal nature, even applying it to his most formidable antagonist. Professor James Moriarty:

"...had hereditary tendencies of the most diabolical kind. A criminal strain ran in his blood..."(4)

Curiously, Holmes expressed himself as rejecting the physical stigmata of crime on a certain occasion:

"The most winning woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for their insurance money, and the most repellent man of my acquaintance is a philanthropist who has spent nearly a quarter of a million upon the London poor."(5)

Nevertheless, internal evidence in the Canon shows a strong Lombro-

1. Walter Breen thinks the way I teach Sociology is Criminal Sociology, but this isn't the same thing at all.
2. "The Naval Treaty"
3. The Hound of the Baskervilles
4. "The Final Problem"
5. The Sign of Four (NOT of the Four, mind you.)

sian orientation. This, incidentally, suggests real research on Holmes' part, since Lombroso's theories were of limited appeal in England, despite Havelock Ellis' support for them. Almost the only criminal who does not betray himself by stigmata of some sort is John Clay, the bank robber -- who, significantly, has "royal blood in his veins" and gamely sacrifices himself to let his partner escape(6). He has "a clean-cut, boyish face".

Stigmata are often not explicitly accounted for -- we being left to draw conclusions from the criminal's role in the story. Sometimes, though, they are explained as the effect of "passions". (And you know what specific passion that euphemism referred to at the turn of the century, right?) For instance, Dr. Grimesby Roylott, whose pet swamp adder did away with inconvenient people for him, has:

"A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and marked with every evil passion...while his deep-set, bile-shot eyes, and his high, thin, fleshless nose, gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old bird of prey."(7)

More frequently, however, stigmata are the effect of "nature" -- that is, signs of the inborn criminal character Lombroso associated with them. Colonel Sebastian Moran, the second in command to Professor Moriarty's criminal organization, caught in the act of trying to shoot Holmes with a pneumatic gun...

"...was an elderly man, with a thin, projecting nose, a high, bald forehead, and a huge grizzled moustache...his face was gaunt and swarthy, scored with deep, savage lines...it was a tremendously virile and yet sinister face...with the brow of a philosopher above and the jaw of a sensualist below, the man must have started with great capacities for good or for evil. But one could not look upon his cruel blue eyes, with their drooping, cynical lids, or upon the fierce, aggressive nose and the threatening, deep-lined brow, without reading Nature's plainest danger signals."(8)

Still more manifest is the sensualist and wife-beater Ronder, of Ronder's Wild Beast Show -- a description almost as quotable as Sax Rohmer's sketch of Fu Manchu, I think:

"It was a dreadful face -- a human pig, or rather a human wild boar, for it was formidable in its bestiality. One could imagine that vile mouth champing and foaming in its rage, and one could conceive those small, vicious eyes darting pure malignancy as they looked forth upon the world. Ruffian, bully, beast -- it was all written on that heavy-jowled face."(9)

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6. "The Red-Headed League"
 7. "The Adventure of the Speckled Band"
 8. "The Adventure of the Empty House"
 9. "The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger"

Now, by good fortune it is possible to find confirmation that these characteristics are not strictly literary window-dressing, but are in good sooth associated with the Lombrosian causes: that is, atavism and bestiality. In The Sign of Four Holmes and Watson track down Tonga, an Andaman Islander. Now, Tonga is a complete alien -- a pigmy from a group of islands in the Indian Ocean. Thus he can hardly be expected to show any cultural characteristics of the European-English criminal. As a primitive, however -- pigmies were at that time considered a more primitive type of humanity, biologically(1) -- he does display the characteristics of his degraded evolutionary position. And Dr. Watson, perhaps prejudiced by circumstances(2), observes:

"Never have I seen features so deeply marked with all bestiality and cruelty. His small eyes glowed and burned with a sombre light, and his thick lips writhed back from his teeth, which grinned and chattered at us with half-animal fury."

I have here been speaking as if Holmes' theories actually were derived from the writings of Lombroso. But, of course, Holmes was himself a practicing criminologist of wide experience and great intellectual powers. It is perfectly possible that his principles paralleled Lombroso's, being developed to the same conclusions from the same source, namely the concepts of Darwinian evolution. Holmes' knowledge of biology is curiously inconsistent; once he tried to kill a jellyfish by crushing it with a rock(3), but here we find him advancing an argument plainly referring to evolutionary doctrines as he discusses the career of Colonel Sebastian Moran:

"There are some trees, Watson, which grow to a certain height, and then develop some unsightly eccentricity, suddenly. You will see it often in humans. I have a theory that the individual represents in his development the whole procession of his ancestors, and that such a sudden turn to good or evil stands for some strong influence which came into the line of his pedigree. The person becomes, as it were, the epitome of the history of his own family."(4)

Holmes' concluding sentence here is an obvious paraphrase in colloquial language of Ernst Haeckel's famous Biogenetic Law, which that zoologist used to such effect in supporting Darwinism. "Ontogeny recapitulates Phylogeny" -- the development of the individual retraces the evolutionary course of his ancestry.

Holmes was rather inclined to pull Watson's leg at times, but the evidences for his attitudes -- of which I have cited only the most striking instances -- seems to me to be indirect enough to rule this possibility out, and clear enough to hint that they do really give us an idea of the criminological theories of Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

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1. They really aren't; see Papa Villy's "The Little People" on this point.
2. Tonga was about to shoot a poisoned dart at him.
3. "The Adventure of The Lion's Mane"
4. "The Adventure of The Empty House"