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REDHEAD AND OUTLAW

A Study in Criminal Anthropology

Hans von Hentig

Dr. Hans von Hentig, University of Kansas City, was Professor of Criminal Law and Criminology at the University of Bonn, before he came to the United States eleven years ago. He became Expert Assistant to the Attorney General in Washington, Director of the Colorado Crime Survey, Research Professor at the University of Puerto Rico, and taught at Yale and the Universities of Iowa, Oregon and California. His work: *Crime: Causes and Conditions* was recently published by MacGraw-Hill in New York. Dr. von Hentig intends to return to Europe, as soon as peace has been concluded, and to re-assume the Editorship of the *Monatsschrift fuer Kriminalpsychologie*, that he edited 1925-1935 together with Professor Gustav Aschaffenburg.—EDITOR.

Some distinct physical characteristics are found in criminals. They are likewise met in law-abiding people. They are occasionally exhibited by a genius, a great statesman, or a benefactor of mankind. There can thus not be any direct or proximate causal relationship between these peculiarities and misconduct. They enter, of course, the set of conjunctive conditions which precipitate a criminal act or produce criminal behavior. But it is only one of the many forces that shake or steady human conduct. In all the causative bundle it is only one stick.

It would be wrong to see in certain physical features only the biological side. They are subject to the conscious or unconscious judgment of other men. As reflected in the eyes and the attitudes of our fellow beings these biological variations become social forces. According to the individual disposition they are lightly set aside, recast into higher achievement or suffered to establish themselves as a handicap. There is a gradual evolution, first from a physical distinction to a problem of the mind, then from mental trouble to disorder of a sociological nature.

We are not concerned with these complications which we shall discuss elsewhere.¹ Nor do we want to add new interpretations. We want to present merely a few more facts which we have encountered in recent studies of an interesting phase of American criminal history. It is the period when the wild tempo of the advancing frontier bred a strange delinquent product, the outlaw.

Going back to the year 1800 we hear of the famous robber Big Harpe who infested the Ohio Valley that he had "coarse hair of a fiery redness."² In the early days of Oklahoma Territory

¹ Hans von Hentig: *The Criminal and his Victim*, to be published soon by the Yale University Press, New Haven.

² Emerson Hough: *The Story of the Outlaw*. A study of the Western Desperado. The Outing Publishing Company, New York 1907, p. 41.

a man, named George Weightman became the notorious "Red Buck" of the Doolin gang.³ One "Red Yager" was hanged as outlaw in Idaho.⁴ In the Gold Hill News of December 9th, 1879 we read this sheriff's circular:

"Red Mike"—Under indictment for murder. He is a native of Ireland . . . about 35 years old; sandy, almost red hair and whiskers; red face . . . ; a reddish or brown suit (overalls and shirt) of canvas. I will give \$100 for him in any shape you may bring him."⁵

The name of the ringleader in a prison break in the Nevada State Prison was "Red Mike" Langan. He was "under charge of murdering Pat Leonard, whom he had knifed to death on C Street (Virginia City) as the climax of an old feud."⁶ Among Sam Bass' men who held up the stage coach in Deadwood Gulch, Dakota, was a man called "Reddy."⁷ Another "Reddy's" description is given by Dr. Gardiner⁸ after he had met this bad man: "This man was of powerful build. His big hat was tilted back, and a shock of fiery hair stood up all over his head, against the broad brim." One of the robbers who held up a store on Dec. 6, 1883 in Bisbee was O. W. Sample, alias "Big Red."⁹

Tom Horn, hanged in Cheyenne and buried in Boulder, Colorado, remembered the famous Micky Free, scout and Indian guide. "He . . . was the wildest dare-devil in the world at this time. . . . He had long, fiery red hair and one blue eye."¹⁰ California Joe, the guide who had been with Custer on the Washita, was red haired;¹¹ as guides served only the most fearless and daring men who, in quiet times, indulged in reckless dissipation, gambling and fighting. To conclude this enumeration we mention that the notorious gunman Charlie Harper who in 1861 roamed through the streets of Walla Walla was a young man of twenty-five "of erect carriage, clear florid complexion, and profuse auburn hair."¹² Another not less famous gunman, Patterson, had a "fair complexion, light hair streaked with gray, sandy whiskers."¹³ It may be noted that during the second

³ Richard S. Graves: *Oklahoma Outlaws*. No date. No publ. p. 59.

⁴ Nathaniel P. Langford: *Vigilante Days and Ways*. A. C. McClurg and Co., Chicago 1912, p. 317.

⁵ Wells Drury: *An Editor on the Comstock Lode*. Farrar and Rinehart, New York, 1936, p. 311.

⁶ "Red Mike was notoriously quarrelsome." Ibidem p. 162.

⁷ Wayne Gard: *Sam Bass*. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1936, p. 69.

⁸ Charles F. Gardiner: *Doctor at Timberline*. Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho, 1938, p. 94.

⁹ Lorenzo D. Walters: *Tombstone's Yesterday*. Acme Printing Company, Tucson, Arizona, 1928, p. 165.

¹⁰ *Life of Tom Horn*. Written by himself. A vindication. The Louthan Book Company, Denver, 1904, p. 32.

¹¹ Richard J. Walsh: *The Making of Buffalo Bill*. A study in heroics. The Bobb-Merrill Company, Indianapolis, 1928, p. 186.

¹² Langford: loc. cit. p. 40.

¹³ Ibidem 95.

half of the nineteenth century whiskers and beards or goatees were fashionable. Some men like Buffalo Bill, "Wild Bill," and for a while even Quantrill, wore long hairs touching the shoulders. It was much easier than now to distinguish the various shades of red, even the lighter tinges called "tawny", "auburn", or "sandy." There are many more terms on the female side and there is quite a state of mind behind these endeavors of linguistic embellishers, but we are this time only concerned with men, although close study reveals that some of the greatest "killers" exhibited feminine traits or ambi-sexual tendencies.¹⁴

Yet all this is small fry. The objection is justified that we know little of these "bad men" and that, because of their striking appearance, they might have been remembered rather than ordinary men who killed and were killed. It is more impressive to learn that some of the real great desperados, well known and much studied, belong to the group under examination. We mean William Clarke Quantrill,¹⁵ the famous guerilla leader, Wild Bill and Jesse James.

Quantrill is depicted this way¹⁶:

"His face was round and full . . . His forehead was high, his hair almost white (of the Tow-head variety) and his nose was curved and sinister."

His hair changed in a strange way. When twenty he came to Kansas. He was very boyish in appearance. "His hair," says Connelley,¹⁷ "was still very light, not taking on the red tinge until later." Thus, for reasons we don't know Quantrill's hair changed from white to yellow¹⁸ and then to a reddish lustre.

Wild Bill or better James Butler Hickok, the great killer who was shot in Deadwood, had "long auburn hair hanging down over his massive shoulders."¹⁹ He was a dandy who paid as much as sixty dollars for a pair of embroidered high-heeled

¹⁴ Wild Bill, the terror of Abilene and Hays City, married 1876 a French widow, a lion-trainer, eleven years older than he was. William E. Connelly: *Wild Bill and His Era*. The Press of the Pioneers, New York, 1933, p. 199. "She was a most . . . fearless woman."

¹⁵ We are justified in stripping Quantrill of the accidental political mask and adding him to the category of common killers and desperados. He is a psychiatric problem.

¹⁶ William E. Connelly: *Quantrill and the Border Wars*. The Torch Press, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1910, 43.

¹⁷ *Ibidem* p. 58.

¹⁸ The hair was yellow according to a report of R. M. Peck, who met him in June 1858, in the Rocky Mountains. *Ibidem* p. 75.

¹⁹ Connelly: *Wild Bill* p. 2 calls it "Golden-brown", in latter years "tawny" (*ibidem* p. 175/176) but Coursey tells the story that some mule skinner one day manhandled the eleven year old Cody (Buffalo Bill). "It was at this moment that a big blonde, with long auburn hair . . . crept out from under a wagon" and saved him from maltreatment. It was the dreaded Wild Bill. O. W. Coursey: *Wild Bill Hickok*. Reprinted from the Sioux Falls Daily Argus Leader, 1924, p. 11.

boots;²⁰ it is a trait we meet again in the modern gangster.

Sam Brown terrorized for some time the mining camp of Virginia City. Before he came to Washoe he had fifteen notches on his gun-butt²¹—and at those times Indians and Chinese did not count. This is his picture:²²

“Sam Brown was a “bad man” . . . a great, thick witted, human Saurian with a booming voice and red side-whiskers which he kept tied under his chin.”

“With long Spanish spurs rattling at his heels and a huge bowie-knife slung to his belt, the boys made way when they heard him coming . . . For killing to Sam Brown was an art—a profession.”

The descriptions of Jesse James vary. One report in an historically rather unreliable book, it is true, speaks of brown eyes and dark hair.²³ But a reporter who saw the body after his death describes his beard as sandy,²⁴ and what we learn of his temperament is certainly that of a redhead.²⁵ “He is revengeful in nature,” we are told, “always sanguine, impetuous, almost heedless.” All observers agree that his older brother Frank had “a shortly cropped full beard and straggling mustache, of a pale reddish color.”²⁶ A farmer who saw the five bandits who robbed the Pacific Railroad at Adair, Iowa, spoke of the heavy sandy whiskers of the leader and the light whiskers, “almost sandy,” of a second man.²⁷ These were Frank and Jesse James. Hold-up man No. 5 had a Roman nose, “reddish whiskers.”²⁸ This was Bob Younger of the notorious Younger brothers. The farmer who was not robbed called him “very pleasant in appearance.”²⁹

With few exceptions all the great outlaws died of a violent death. The most famous of them were shot by other bad men; law enforcing agencies, stage coach companies, railroads and other interested groups induced members of their own gang or other gunmen to eliminate them. This is the way how Jesse James ended, Sam Bass and Wild Bill died. Sam Bass was betrayed by Jim Murphy who gained impunity for his robberies

²⁰ Connelley: *Wild Bill* p. 3. “He had an actor’s passion for fine clothes” *ibidem*.

²¹ George D. Lyman: *The Saga of the Comstock Lode, Boom Days in Virginia City*. C. Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1934, p. 54.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ J. W. Buel: *The Border Bandits*. An authorized and thrilling History of the noted outlaws Jesse and Frank James. Historical Publishing Company, St. Louis, 1881, p. 118.

²⁴ Robertus Love: *Rise and Fall of Jessie James*. G. P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 1926, p. 347.

²⁵ Buel: *Border Bandits*, pp. 118 and 119.

²⁶ *Ibidem* p. 117: “Sandy side whiskers.” Love: *Rise and Fall*, p. 386.

²⁷ J. W. Buel: *Border Outlaws. The Younger Brothers*. Historical Publishing Company, St. Louis, 1881, pp. 164 and 165.

²⁸ *Ibidem* 165.

²⁹ Of Jim Younger the farmer’s opinion is “good looking, but appeared dissipated.” *Ibidem*.

by leading the Bass gang into a police trap. "He wears a red mustache and chin beard," we are told.³⁰ Wild Bill was murdered by Jack McCall on August 2, 1876 in Deadwood. A contemporary saw the killer in court and described him:³¹

"Jack McCall . . . presented a most forbidding appearance. He was twenty-five years of age, but dissipation and a low life had painted their stains on his ugly face. His brow was low and retreating . . . while sandy hair and mustache and cross eyes completed the unmistakable evidences of his villainous character."

Strangely enough, "Roussi" means stool pigeon in French criminal slang.³² "Un Rousse" to the Paris gangster is a policeman or a detective. The origin of the term is hard to explain, but already 150 years ago Vidocq spoke of an undercover agent, a "mouchard" as a rousse.³³

There is a partial explanation for the frequency of redheads among the outlaws. Life in those days and in those surroundings depended largely on the rapidity with which a Colt or a Derringer was used. It seems that red-headedness is often combined with accelerated motor innervation. The "Reddy" of the Sam Bass gang we have mentioned before incurred the bitter anger of the other road agents by his precipitate gunplay. "They threatened to kill Reddy for his hasty shooting, but finally decided to give him a chance to leave the Hills, which he did in great haste."³⁴ Red Mike Langan, the ringleader in the Nevada Prison break, "was notoriously quarrelsome."³⁵ And when we proceed to the somewhat higher types of gangster-politicians we meet the mental counter-part of this physical "acceleration." James Casey was a great politician in early San Francisco. Bancroft calls him "a thief, fireman, ballot-box stuffer, supervisor, editor and murderer."³⁶ He was hanged by the Vigilance Committee on May 22, 1856 for having shot a political antagonist. This is this picture as drawn by Bancroft:³⁷

"Above a high broad forehead the head was thinly covered with dark sandy hair and the thin florid face was bordered by short side whiskers."

Bancroft explained the prominent part Casey had been able to play in San Francisco by the restless, pushing, promoting,

³⁰ Walter Prescott Webb: *The Texas Rangers*. A century of frontier defense. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1936, p. 390.

³¹ Quoted by Connelley: *Wild Bill*, p. 210.

³² A. Barrere: *Argot and Slang*, London, 1887, p. 418.

³³ *Ibidem* p. 417.

³⁴ Wayne Gard: *Sam Bass*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1936, p. 69.

³⁵ Wells Drury: *An Editor on the Comstock Lode*. Farrar and Rinehardt, New York, 1936, p. 161.

³⁶ *The Works* of H. H. Bancroft, Vol. 37. *Popular Tribunals*. The History Company Publishers, San Francisco, 1887. Vol. II, p. 43.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

“dynamic” character of the man. “His mind,” he writes,³⁸ “was active, his disposition quick and resentful and his temperament nervous-sanguine.” In this respect he resembled very much the great Boss Tweed of New York.³⁹ “Quick on the trigger”, “fast”—thus had nature made them to all intents and purposes. On a higher level this easy “ignition” of nervous and mental processes may lead to prominent achievement, if the individuality on which this driving force has been fastened is of superior fibre.⁴⁰

There are many other sides to the problem. We have only discussed a specific human type bred by the unique conditions of frontier life. It must be concluded that the number of red-headed men among the noted outlaws surpassed their rate in the normal population. The frontier was an all-male society. It was therefore easy to omit the issue of the red-haired woman.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “Grey hair from originally auburn color.” D. T. Lynch: “Boss” Tweed. The story of a grim generation. Blue Ribbon Books, New York, 1931, p. 398.

⁴⁰ “General Sherman’s aide de camp was Caption N. Lyon . . .” a red-bearded, nervous visionary like himself, a man with “stormy eyes.” Lloyd Lewis: *Sherman, Fighting Prophet*. Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1932, p. 158. Sherman was a redhead.