SOME PRINCIPLES of POLICEMANSHIP

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CHAPTER I.

The Police Ideal in the Public Service

The past hundred years have seen many revolutions in England, social, industrial and mechanical, but none more remarkable in its result than the revolution in the idea of Police service and what it stands for, or to give it another name, the rise of the “New Police.”

Before the nineteenth century, the Police of England had been allowed to become a by-word. The Civil War and the Puritan regime had been followed by the license and disorder of the Restoration of 1660.

Partly due to the restoration Englishman’s exaggerated ideas of liberty and partly to the absence of a civic sense and to the universal corruption of public life in those days, the “Charleys” of the seventeenth century and the “Bow Street runners” of the eighteenth were objects of universal contempt, because of their decrepitude, venality or impotence.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century the law was tightened up, but no matter how drastic a law may be made on paper—even to the penalty of hanging for the theft of a sheep—it remains a dead letter in the absence of a force and a will to give it effect.

Throughout the eighteenth century crime and disorder were rampant in England and several times the city of London was threatened with partial destruction by mob-violence. The law remained almost powerless.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the degradation of the ancient office of constable was complete. Even the office of High Constable had almost ceased to function, save that the holder was a “parasite of publicans and an agency for the supply of coal and other goods to licensed premises.”

In 1822 Sir Robert Peel, who, as Secretary of State for Ireland (1812-1818), had had experience of Police organisation in Dublin, became Home Secretary in the English Cabinet and at once secured the appointment of a committee to investigate the Police affairs of the Metro-
polis, in the hope that he would obtain for London "as perfect a system of Police as is consistent with the character of a free country." So strong, however, was the prejudice against his views, that he made no progress in his first Ministry.

In February 1828 he again became Home Secretary and appointed another Committee which devoted itself to an exposure of the rottenness and corruption which beset the existing system of magistrates, Bow Street runners, parish constables and the night watchmen of London. These disclosures gave him the backing he required in Parliament to ensure the passage of his reforms.

The result was the birth of the "New Police." The measure, "An Act for improving the Police in and near the Metropolis", received the Royal Assent on 19th June 1829 and laid the foundation-stone of the modern London Metropolitan Police, which is to-day the pride and envy of the world.

The principles of the "New Police" were:

1. the retention, emancipation and strengthening of the ancient office of Headborough or Constable, which has been extant in England for more than a thousand years.

2. the separation of the executive powers from the judicial functions of the "Old Police" and the investiture of the "New Police" with those executive powers, widened and clarified and independent of the magistracy;

3. the appointment of two joint heads of the "New Police" (referred to in the Act as two "Justices of the Peace", but known since July 1829 as the "Commissioners of Police") independent of the magistrates and answerable only to "one of His Majesty's principal Secretaries of State" (in practice, the Home Secretary).

4. the conception of the Police as a citizen body imbued with the ideals of courtesy, forbearance and helpfulness to all and acting as the servants, not the masters of the Public.
The regeneration of the Police service since 1830 from the condition into which a thoughtless Society had plunged it, has been in fact nothing other than a slow reversion to that most ancient principle of policemanship established in England by King Alfred the Great, namely communal responsibility for the preservation of order and for protection against crime and the assignment by the King of the initiative in this early collective security system, to a body of Tithingmen or Headboroughs, of whom the modern Policeman is the direct constitutional descendant. “Service to the community” was then as now, the watchword of those called to serve as Headboroughs or Constables. The word “borough” is derived from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning “defence” or “safety.”

The rise of the modern Police system in Britain during the past hundred years from degradation and public contempt, to a position of distinction and public respect, has nevertheless, been a bitter and uphill struggle in the face of constant and withering Public criticism, malicious attacks from private or political motives and often deserted in the rear through official vacillation, equivocation or bad faith.

But the idealism of Peel, entrusted by him to the first two Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police whom he chose himself, Sir Charles Rowan and Sir Richard Mayne, prevailed against all opposition and against incessant charges of oppression, discrimination, venality and militarism.

For twenty years these two men worked together devotedly and in harmony towards the achievement of Peel’s ideal, which they faithfully and successfully upheld:

“not only against private pressure from highly placed individuals.....but even against backsliding on the part of Peel’s successors at the Home Office.”

These attacks, many of them influential and sincere and some of them well-founded, had their origin mostly in the Englishman’s abhorrence of any threatened or actual curtailment of his birthright of liberty, in his fear of militarism through the organisation of a “Blue Army” and in his stubborn English dislike of official attempts to regiment his daily life.
But if the past hundred years have witnessed a revolution in Police theory and practice, the past thirty years and particularly the post-war period have seen a still more intense revolution in the relations of the “New Police” with the Public. For this, the invention of the internal combustion engine is responsible.

Before the coming of the motor-car the profession of Policeman hardly touched the average citizen. To-day, unfortunately, every motor-car owner is a potential subject of Police attention and lives within the shadow of the law.

The expansion of the motor industry, the growth of the traffic problems which have sprung up round it, and the congested and high-speed conditions of to-day, have brought the Police into the spotlight of modern life—and death—on the roads and into the lives and consciousness of Mr. Everyman, in a way which would otherwise have been impossible, and have combined to create, as it were, a revolution within a revolution.

Hand in hand with the transport question, there has arisen in modern life a multitude of social problems affecting the safety, health and happiness of the individual, in the solution of which the Big Wheel of modern Government has allotted to the Police a not inconsiderable share. This circumstance has helped the thinking public to a fuller realisation of the ancient idea of Police duty as being one of the general obligations of citizenship, to be undertaken—like jury service—by all in turn and to be reconciled, as well as might be, with other occupations. From this concept has arisen the modern specialised Police who perform these obligations of citizenship on behalf of the whole community.

The despised “Charley” of the day before yesterday has in turn become the tolerated “Robert” of yesterday and the indispensable “robot” of to-day.

The advent of traffic expansion has brought in its train a heightened Public interest in the Police profession, and widened opportunities for co-operation between Police and Public which is the secret of successful policemanship throughout the world.
This, in turn, has led to a recent important public re-statement of the Police ideal, recorded in the "Desborough Report" (1919), a document which is, itself, nearly as great a landmark in Police history as the reforms of Sir Robert Peel.

In paragraph 28 of the report we read:—

"A policeman has responsibilities and obligations which are peculiar to his calling and distinguish him from other public servants."

and in Paragraph 29:

"His character should be unblemished: he should be humane and courteous and generally he should possess a combination of moral, mental and physical qualities not ordinarily required in other employments........... The burden of individual discretion and responsibility placed upon a constable is much greater than that of any other public servant of subordinate rank."

and in Paragraph 122:

"These obligations can only be discharged by the strictest attention to duty, a high standard of conduct and the subordination of personal considerations to the interests of the service and of the community on the part of all ranks. In a service such as the Police, it is essential that a high standard of discipline should be maintained and that irregularities of conduct, which would not be noticed in other employments, should be the subject of disciplinary treatment. Otherwise the Police would be unable to retain the public confidence, and the proper performance of their duties would become impossible."

It is important to keep the Police ideal and the principles upon which it rests, constantly before the eyes of both the Public and the Police themselves, so as to counteract the ever-present temptation to back-sliding and abuse of power which besets the Police path, no less than to remind the Public of its part in the communal security system, and its special obligations to the Police, its servants, in the maintenance, uncorrupted, of that ancient concept.
It must be remembered that almost all Police work is unspectacular and monotonous, encased in burdensome detail and open on all sides to ungenerous criticism. Unlike the collectivism of the fighting services, it is based on the principle of the individual responsibility of the constable for his own actions. It has no background of display or pageantry—no shop-window,—and whether in the unostentatious shepherding of crowds, the making of quick decisions in an emergency, or in facing a gunman or an angry mob, the Policeman's work is done on his own responsibility and in cold-blood.

Apart from the distorted mind of the criminal world, there is unhappily an uninstructed section of the Public which, handicapped by a "jungle" mentality, still sees in the Force that guards it, the hand of an enemy instead of a friend—an enemy that restricts its liberties.

This attitude of mind is forgetful that the Police control only to safeguard, direct only to smooth the way, restrict only within the limits imposed by law, arrest only to protect and suppress by force only when threats, conspiracy or violence demand it for the common good.

These are not the actions of an oppressive master but of a kindly and faithful servant, the unsleeping servant of the Public.

It must be remembered too that almost any Police duty is susceptible of being "commercialised" and turned into an organised source of private gain (a "racket") by methods of collusion or extortion, and therein lies the persistent challenge to Police standards of conduct and idealism—a challenge the constable must learn to meet at all times alone, with a clear eye and conscience, and must be helped to do so by the experience and example of his officers and by the sympathy and understanding of a right-thinking Public. There can be no compromise whatsoever upon this aspect of our work. No countenance can be given in any degree to the abuse of Police power under any disguise, whether with or without the connivance of any section of the Public. Once permitted the evil grows
apace beyond control both above and below the surface. Confidence disappears, conspiracy and deception take its place and a quick descent into demoralisation completes the collapse of the ideal, and nothing remains but the empty uniform and a sham masquerade.

From 1829 to 1919 and on to 1937, despite setbacks and heartbreaks, "scandals" and politics, the spirit of service has struggled forward towards its fulfilment, "a citizen body imbued with the qualities of courtesy, forbearance and helpfulness to all, and acting as the servants not the masters of the Public," until to-day the Police find themselves in the forefront of the humanitarian professions of the world.

The church ministers to the spiritual needs of man: medicine attends upon his physical ills, and the Police take thought for and safeguard under the law every aspect of his material welfare and security under the State.

The man of God, the medical man and the policeman, each in their several spheres and without consideration of material reward, place their services continually at the disposal of their fellowmen. These are the three professions which, before all others, have the daily handling of the raw stuff of life, twenty-four hours round the clock.

The almost unconscious rise in the status of the Police, from public scorn and derision to high idealism, has been won in the teeth of a fierce opposition.

But if the struggle has been hard, we have been in good company.

The noble profession of medicine, with which that of the Police has many points of resemblance, has itself not so long emerged from a period of eclipse when quackery and humbug were its stock-in-trade and public contempt its portion.

Again, the heroic profession of nursing was rescued by the ministry of Florence Nightingale less than a hundred years ago from the clammy hands of the slattern and the drab.
What Hunter, Pringle, Jenner, Lord Lister and others
did for medicine, Sir Robert Peel did for the Police—he
gave it back its ideals and raised it from the level of a
mean and parasitic livelihood to that of a science—an
honourable profession spent in the service of others.

There are abuses in the Police, more perhaps than are
generally known and some are well-concealed and difficult
of access and exposure.

This is because, unlike other professions, the Police
is ill-equipped with the means for protecting itself. It
lacks a Court of Honour.

How far any individual Police Force under the Crown
may fall short of its high ideal is the concern of the
particular administration it serves and of the Officers who
command it. A community will generally receive only that
quality of Police service which it deserves.

To uphold the Police ideal throughout the Empire,
there are certain essential requirements, namely, a local
law that maintains it; a local Government that perceives
and respects it; Heads of Police who, in addition to their
technical qualifications, are thoroughly imbued with it;
Officers, who, having devoted their lives to it, maintain that
devotion throughout their service, knowing that the
maintenance of an ideal demands constant watchfulness
and sacrifice: officers, too, who realise that their own
personal example and their authority under the law over
their men are the only two guarantees the Government
has for the maintenance of a reputable Force and who,
being neither tyrants nor trucklers, refuse to accept any
whittling away of that authority to suit expediency or to
meet individual cases: officers who know how to establish
without friction and to maintain without resentment the
Police authority in its rightful place in the Public con-
sciousness: finally, officers who refuse to countenance and
are ready at any moment to challenge as a betrayal of the
public trust reposed in them by the Government, any
attempt to lower the British Police ideal, inspired and
committed to the keeping of successive generations of
Police officers by the genius of Sir Robert Peel.