

1912

Police Gleanings

Joseph Matthew Sullivan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Joseph Matthew Sullivan, Police Gleanings, 3 J. Am. Inst. Crim. L. & Criminology 393 (May 1912 to March 1913)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

POLICE GLEANINGS.

JOSEPH MATTHEW SULLIVAN.

Bail Commissioner, Boston.

The Chump Copper.—The civil service commission has turned the raw recruit of a “chump copper” upon the defenceless community. He has left behind him the express wagon, or street car as the case may be and he yearns for the day to come when his name will be a household word like William J. Burns and Allan Pinkerton. On his first night's duty the older policeman shows him the different streets and alley-ways and he learns the lazy gait which is a familiar sight to all city people. The veteran policeman simply points out the road to the recruit, and allows him to guess the rest. The chump copper is never trained with the veteran but obtains a certain degree of efficiency at the expense of the public. The ordinary policeman is not any better behaved than the average army or navy recruit and has more license and less restraint than either of these classes. The army and navy recruit has no discretion but must obey any and all orders of his superior officers. A policeman in cases of emergency must use his own discretion and it is a dangerous thing to entrust some people with a power that they might abuse. He can walk the streets until the close of duty and report to his superior officer that the buildings are still standing. He must appear “wise” whether he is or not. He can get put wise by the “nervers” at cheap dances and the hop and cocaine fiends who can be found at all hours of the night frequenting “quick lunch rooms.” The “fly” bartender gives him just enough information to enable him to get everything all mixed up; the waitress at the ten cent lunch counter tips off straight and crooked people to him without taking any pains to discriminate between the good and the bad. The inquisitive janitor keeps him informed as to the habits and characteristics of lodgers who keep late hours; the street car conductor acts as a bureau of information and thereby keeps his hand in as he is already an aspirant for a position on the police force. But to be able to catch a thief no one will tell him because nobody knows. There is only one way to learn to catch a criminal and that is through experience. He learns to his cost in the police business that it is not what you know yourself that counts; it is what your superior officer thinks you know. This is the age of bluff and he concludes that he will play the game and perhaps become a suc-

cessful bluffer and obtain promotion on the strength of "looking wise" and thereby earn the golden lace which will make him look all the prettier to the citizens when he goes out on special detail.

Police Trials.—The police commissioner has such a difficult time in making his official family behave that he has little time to give to the interests of the public. The police want private trials for their own misdeeds but public trials for their victims. Transfers are often made not for efficiency but for the good of the service. This vague phrase "good of the service" covers a multitude of sins. We realize that in police affairs it would not do to take the public into their confidence but the calendar of undetected crime in our large cities is appalling. The taxpayers have no way of finding out how much of their money is wasted; we have no means of finding out the blunders of police, the scandals that are hushed up, and the guilty who are allowed to escape through inefficient police duty. The calendar of police trials in the City of New York is as formidable as any court calendar; police are no better than the rest of the human family and they have as many, if not more failings than the average citizen. They still make love to the night waitresses at the all night lunch rooms; they get under cover from the cold on winter nights and they get busy whenever occasion demands to fool the near sighted sergeant. When they get old they are made keepers of detention rooms and they sit in a chair and smoke a pipe all day long. They are necessary evils; we cannot get along without them but we could easily get along with less of them and the public would get some relief. The physician's blunders are covered by the marble slab and newly made mound; the "chump copper's" blunders consists in the cells where innocent men make the lot of prison officials almost unbearable because a guiltless man always chafes under prison restraint. The public will some day arise in righteous wrath and demand from the police an intelligent account of their stewardship; they are tired of reading police reports which contain fulsome flattery of themselves and doubtful statements of the substantial decrease of crime. Police trials should be conducted in courts of justice; the judge would "play no favorites" and the unfit guardian of the public safety would get his walking ticket in short order. When a policeman commits an offence he can shield himself on the ground that he is the sole support of his wife and little family; if he considered for one moment how many men he has torn from their little families he would become a more conscientious guardian of the safety of the community.

The School for the Raw Recruit.—The average policeman is not inclined toward literature; he barely reads the newspapers and at the end of his day's work he contents himself with whatever gossip he may hear

POLICE GLEANINGS

at the station house. He chafes under the name "chump copper;" a chump he really is and in his own heart he knows it. If the officer in charge of the station sends him to look anyone up he will ring over twenty door bells in his search for the fugitive and will succeed only in spreading the "hue and cry." When he gets through his search the whole town knows who is wanted. The sidewalk is his desk and the street is his college. He must get the rough edges smoothed down or he will never obtain any promotion or recognition from his superiors. The police brickbat must be polished and the private school will do it if there is any fertile soil. He must learn how to spread himself in court and tell the judge that the thief he arrested is a professional. The culprit may be a tramp waiter out of a job, but the half asleep judge on the bench learns to swallow this "police sophistry" hook, line, sinker and all. He must ask for "high bail" and tell the judge that the man arrested is a pickpocket with an international reputation; the man in fact could not pick a squash out of a barrel or put his hand in the "subway." He can wander down town and look over the gallery and ask the officer in charge to explain to him about "finger prints." The average policeman can as easily understand "finger prints" as a page of Sanskrit. The hotel porter puts him wise to the "pool sharks;" the pool room keeper stands in and tips off his own customers; the cab-driver for past favors tells him all about his passengers of the night before; the firemen tell all they know and much that they don't know. When he gets to court he thinks it is a personal reflection if he loses his case; he loves to call in the reporter on every trifling case and make good copy for the newspapers. When the police commissioner forgets to send his name down for examination for promotion he thinks that the wrong man was appointed director of the public safety. At last he becomes "wise," finds out the address of the school wherein the "chump copper" can receive a police education, and becomes enrolled as a student. For a stipulated price he can receive "police capsules" and if he shows a fair amount of ability "the golden chevrons are in sight" and the coveted goal is near attainment.

Misuse of Police Power.—The legal scythe swings with heartless regularity; here we have a hospital of contagious moral leprosy; the judge is the surgeon and the police are the knives. This moral cancer like the physical one is incurable because the cure is worse than the disease. Inertia seems to be the rule rather than the exception in the conduct of civil cases. The bane of criminal jurisprudence to-day is the use of police and legal machinery for the collection of bad debts. The principal offenders in this respect are installment houses, cheap jewelry concerns, and clothing on credit establishments. The clothing which they sell to

poor people is of the cheap, flashy variety which loses its shape after the first rain shower. The jewelry they sell is "Irish slum" (cheap jewelry that turns green) and the young man who makes his girl a Christmas present-of this stuff loses her in short order. The watches and clocks bought on the installment plan stop going the moment the purchaser gets behind in his payments. When any one of these cheap articles is pawned these installment dealers immediately rush to the court and procure a warrant against the unfortunate customer. The man arrested is then bailed out, and restitution is made and the installment dealer gets his pound of flesh after using the police and legal machinery to collect his bill and makes no compensation to the county. The judges are very lax in their duty when they allow justice to be thus commercialized and the county treasury placed at the disposal of this class of financial vampires. Thus the police against their will will be made instruments of oppression until the law is repealed which gives a special privilege to this class. In like manner the public have no way of finding out the blunders of probation officers; they are entitled to know whether the wrong man was sent to jail and the victim of circumstances and poverty unjustly sent to prison. Probation officers are better known in the community than police officers; if they call at a man's place of employment they advertise the fact that a man has become entangled in the meshes of the law. This unjust notoriety results in a greater punishment than the court would have inflicted upon him, namely the loss of his situation. Instead of going to the place of residence of a juvenile delinquent they oftentimes visit the boy in school within school hours and this advertises the boy to all his playmates and perhaps as a result of this blunder the teacher may "get down" on him and thus retard his reformation. They also report gossip and hearsay as facts to the court without taking pains to find out whether the information is reliable and authentic; at times the benefits of probation are overestimated and we see the farce of a probation officer interviewing a drunkard in the entry way of a tenement house and asking him his opinion of the character of a citizen.

The Policeman Lawyer.—After a policeman has been on the force about ten years he becomes "wise" and conservative. When a "chump" copper he made many mistakes and became proficient after many hard knocks on the shoals and quicksands of police experience. He begins to read law and learns a great deal of lame law from correspondence and evening law courses at various institutions. Judge Sharswood said "The trouble is not so much to know the law as to know where to find it. The twentieth century definition is not so much to know the law as to recognize it when found." The average police duties belong to the executive

POLICE GLEANINGS

branch of our jurisprudence and the policeman does not bring to the study of law an equitable balance because he is unduly prejudiced on account of his environment. This is not surprising because a great many judges do not know how to read legal decisions intelligently and apply them to the facts in a given case. I venture to say that very few police court judges know how to distinguish "intent" from "attempt" in the criminal cases which come before them for a decision. The policeman after a while becomes "conceited" and a term of service in "plain clothes" is very likely to impair his usefulness. A legal mind is not a common asset; the policeman who tries to blend the characters of lawyer and policeman will invariably bring about a miscarriage of justice. A policeman or detective to be successful must have an analytical mind; he must have a good mental "sifter" and be able to distinguish lies from truth. The judge at times is likely to become careless and take too much stock in police evidence; he seems to forget that a policeman looking for promotion considers each case an asset for his future advancement and the result of a given case is a matter of selfish pride to him and this is irrespective of the justice of the proceedings. In the "guard room" they talk about their court cases and the "fly cop" in the station must keep his record up just as the walking delegate of the union must have "strikes" in order to hold down his job. A little learning is a dangerous thing and the police officer who is partly a lawyer is a menace to the community. The thief who is half lawyer is a "fixer;" he uses the names of people without authority and succeeds in injuring the reputations of citizens in order to obtain for his "pals" some temporary favor. The policeman who thinks he ought to be a magistrate makes a failure of both the legal and detective professions because his untrained mind is unequal to the occasion.

The "Fixer."—In the opinion of the average thief the ability of a lawyer is a secondary consideration. In every large city there are a great many people whose means of subsistence is precarious, and the services of this class can be called into requisition at a very short notice. This class of people are living on their wits; they travel on the border line of the law, and are constantly in need of a lawyer to help them out and save them from jail. They repay a lawyer by infringing upon his profession and doing "law work" for "cheap thieves" for a piece of loose change. The thief enlists their services by "bulling" them along in this manner: "Johnny, you're a smart fellow, go and see him, pull him off; tell him that the man in jail will make it all right." If the thief is useful to the police he can deliver a few small favors and he must help the department whenever it is in his power to do so. A thief "fixer" is

JOSEPH MATTHEW SULLIVAN

always a stool-pigeon; he travels with the gun mobs and leaks to the authorities the names of the men who constitute the various "mobs." There is great jealousy among "thief fixers;" one "fixer" is jealous of the success of another. Of course the "fixer" has a woman out stealing for him and she takes a certain pride in having a "smart fellow" for a "mate." They are unable to help a man in trouble; the favors they receive would be granted anyway, and in this manner they manage to obtain a certain prominence in the social circle of the "underworld." They promise everything to people to obtain a slight benefit for themselves; use your name without authority and promise money to people which they never pay. They manage to live off square people and have a certain faculty of throwing the "dirty work" over upon honest citizens. They last about so long in every city; they soon wear their welcome out and the activity of police and citizens caused by their despicable conduct makes the locality too hot for them and they pack up their effects and move on to another stamping ground. The thief "fixer" loves to hang around hotels and "tout" how much he knows; he has the "cheek" to ask a lawyer whom he owes money and from whom he took a case to obtain for him permission to go into court to interview thieves in the dock. The "fly" pickpocket today is a brain-tapper; he plays safe and uses decent people as a matter of convenience to bridge him over his entanglements in the law. In this manner he uses both police and lawyers, plays upon their sympathies and gets all the benefit of their good nature without paying for it.

The Beggar's Opinion of the Judiciary.—It is interesting to ask the vagrant what his personal opinion is concerning the legal qualifications of the different members of the judiciary. The ability of the judge is determined by the leniency or severity of the sentences imposed in various cases. If a judge is easy-going and imposes light sentences the vagabond sings his praises and extols him to the skies. In like manner if the judge is unnecessarily inquisitive and imposes severe sentences he comes in for universal condemnation. After all he is no different from the rest of the human family; it is human to think well of the man who does you a favor and also to feel unkindly towards the man who goes out of his way to injure you. He can tell you in a moment whether a judge is sincere or simply "playing to the galleries." The quiet judge he fears because experience has taught him that a "barking dog seldom bites;" the judge who gives a stump speech from the bench is more likely to let him off than the quiet judge who has domestic likes and dislikes and who wreaks his vengeance upon whomsoever happens to be near him. He knows it is almost next to useless to try to pull the "wool"

POLICE GLEANINGS

over a judge's eyes; the judge is listening to truths and lies all day long and the best place to learn human nature is from the bench of a police court. Then again a judge will call an inquisitive probation officer to find out if his story concerning his last place of employment is true or false; and the sentence will be increased if he is caught in a lie. So he takes a more discreet course and handles the truth rather carelessly, and tells the court that he is a printer out of work on account of a strike and forced to tramp from one state to another in search of employment and forced to leave behind him a wife suffering from the ravages of consumption. A man can always take refuge behind his wife's ailments and as most of the judges are married a single man has a very little show compared with the malefactor who can use his wife as a legal asylum and thereby escape the wrath of the law.