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# POLICEWOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

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HELEN L. PIGEON<sup>1</sup>

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Strategy is as important in the internal battle of society against its non-conformists as it is in the wars between nations, and the social agency which holds a strategic position against the criminal class has the potential strength of the Greeks at Thermopylae. The police power has inherited this vantage spot from the remote days when private property emerged and demanded protection; when primitive man first realized the blessings of a public "peace" and demanded its preservation; and when crime was declared a common enemy and its prevention a necessity. These functions are broad and they have not been hampered by exact definitions. As they have been developed in modern police practice, both rural and urban, they place the officers at the narrow pass through which the tide of inebriates, mental defectives, unemployed and socially unadjusted are surging on to the prisons, the insane asylums and poor farms. Collectively speaking, the police department views the social life of its people as completely as an aerial photograph pictures its buildings. Every hour of the twenty-four its officers pass the homes of the citizens, investigate disturbances, visit its public gathering places, arrest the criminal of today and advise or warn the criminal of tomorrow. Many of these problems are rooted in social and personal difficulties which need the adjustment of the trained social worker. The proper diagnosis, advice based on scientific knowledge, or reference to a social agency for protection at a crucial moment may mean the difference between the sunlight of freedom or the shadow of high walls. No other agency comes so close to the individual when he is in trouble or in danger. No other position is so universally strategic.

Yet the American public, in sharp contrast to European practice, has allowed the police to function without adequate weapons of defense or offense and ancient history repeats itself when these Barbarians swarm down upon their victims. The police have been denied the stimulus which comes from stability in office and promotion through merit; they have not known the strength derived from a sympathetic public; they have not possessed the facilities to outwit organized

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crime, or a well-paid, skilled personnel, able to discover and adjust social problems. They have blazed their own trail, willing and, in fact, rather anxious to escape the public notice. Even their chiefs have been inarticulate before the civic groups interested in the public welfare.

Recently there has been a reaction against this divorce, strengthened by a new emphasis on crime prevention. The policewoman's movement is one of its manifestations. It places in the police department educated women of high caliber with experience in social case work. Usually they enter through Civil Service and their examinations are more stringent than those provided for the men. After eight years of research and practical experience in examining for the Woman's Bureau at Washington, the United States Civil Service Commission has established as a minimum standard a high school education and at least two years' practical experience in social case work, or its equivalent in technical training and business experience. These standards have been endorsed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and by the International Association of Policewomen and they are gradually going into effect everywhere. This insistence upon a trained personnel is regarded as an entering wedge in raising standards throughout the department and in giving new emphasis to the preventive functions of the police. The problems which affect the welfare of women and children are quite as distinct as traffic or crime detection and they should be treated separately. Their very nature demands the attention of a woman and the skill of a social worker.

Although matrons had been dealing with women prisoners for half a century, the police power was not delegated to women until 1905, when a group of volunteers were appointed to serve at the Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland, Oregon. This led to the permanent establishment of a Woman's Division, and from this seed the movement has grown, slowly at first, but benefiting from the impetus of war enthusiasms, so that today there are policewomen in more than 200 cities in the United States. Wherever there is more than one policewoman the tendency is to organize the service in unit form, a Woman's Bureau, to which the cases of women and children are automatically referred. A woman with police rank is placed at the head and usually she is directly responsible to the Chief of Police. In Washington she is a Lieutenant, in Cleveland a Captain and in Detroit a Deputy Commissioner. Frequently the work is subdivided into departments, one having jurisdiction over cases, another over the patrol of public places and another over detention. It is be-

coming a custom for the head of the Woman's Bureau to be responsible for the care of women prisoners and frequently their offices are housed in the Detention Home. Last year 14,371 women and girls passed through the Detention Home in Detroit and 13,677 women and children were similarly cared for in Washington.

The staff varies from 100 policewomen in New York, 40 in Detroit, 23 in Washington, to two or three policewomen in the smaller cities. Usually the service is protected against changes in administration by an ordinance or clause in the city charter. The Woman's Bureau in Washington is seeking this stability in Congress and the Bill clearly defines the functions of the policewomen and their qualifications. The emphasis on preventive work in the Dayton ordinance is so strong that we quote it in part—"the purpose being to empower this bureau to make such investigations and studies in general, as well as in particular cases, to the end that the moral fibre of the people of the city may be improved and developed, that criminal or immoral and degrading tendencies may be curbed and eventually eradicated, particularly among the youth and younger adults of said city."

In rural communities and towns the policewoman solves the problem of a small budget which must cover a multiplicity of welfare needs, for she is paid through taxation and she has the power to act in emergencies. Often she is matron as well as police officer, and sometimes she adds the duties of relief agent, health officer, welfare worker and school attendance officer. The policewoman in Boise, Idaho, for example, is also city and county welfare worker, disburser of the welfare fund and police matron. These functions are a customary part of the police service in Europe, but our Anglo-Saxon heritage makes us unfamiliar with the practice. There is no valid reason, however, why the policewoman should not answer the urgent demand of public economy. Recently women have been appointed deputy county sheriffs, to centralize the work in large rural areas and to control roadhouses which lie outside the city limits.

The volume of cases is astonishing and illustrates beyond argument the policewoman's opportunity for preventive work. Those who are unsympathetic to the police contend that such cases should be kept out of their hands. This theory is untenable because, as our social agencies are constructed, it is an utter impossibility to keep them away. The runaway child asleep on the park bench at dawn is found by the police; the mother whose child is beaten by a drunken father screams for the police; the young girl rescued from a house of prostitution must depend first upon the police for protection. The

policewoman's movement takes advantage of this opportunity and adds a personnel trained for these very problems. In Toledo, last year, four policewomen dealt with 1,842 cases which represented 85 varieties of human trouble. Similar figures are found in other cities—1,206 complaints investigated in Minneapolis, 3,642 in Detroit, 802 in Tacoma and 1,425 in Washington. These figures do not estimate the vast number of young people warned against danger in public places, or the deterrent effect of constant supervision through patrol.

Sometimes a city stands out through its success with a particular type of case. Last year in Detroit over 90% of 1,404 missing women and girls were located, a gain in efficiency of more than 20% over the record of any previous year. In Lawrence, Massachusetts, an arrangement has been made with the lodging houses, whereby girls without visible means of support are referred for investigation, and many runaways and fugitives from justice have been found. In Washington policewomen delegated to the department stores render such excellent service with first offenders that out of several thousand cases only 57 have been recidivists. In Worcester, Massachusetts, the policewomen succeeded in breaking up a "crime school" in which a woman of 23 years was teaching very small girls to steal in the department stores.

In addition to her work with cases the policewoman deals with the conditions which create delinquency. A well-grounded criticism of the social worker has been her propensity to busy herself in a search for technical perfection without interpreting to the public certain community conditions which her case-analysis revealed. By making the supervision and control of public amusement a definite part of her service, the policewoman takes immediate advantage of what she learns through case investigation. A recent questionnaire sent to 40 cities reveals that in 35 of the cities the policewoman supervises dance halls and in 35, moving picture houses, and this proportion is probably correct for the country as a whole. Sometimes special supervisors devote their entire time to the dance hall problem, investigating applications for licenses, issuing the licenses, outlining the rules of management, recommending matrons, visiting the halls at regular intervals, following up difficult cases and possessing the power to revoke licenses for violation of rules by the management. Dayton, Wichita, Kenosha and Indianapolis have organized their work in this manner.

In the moving picture houses the policewomen have won the approval of the managers by their efficiency in dealing with degenerate

men who annoy women. They can secure evidence hidden from the man in uniform and they will give testimony in court, which the average woman refuses. Their service has been extended to truants and children "parked" by their shopping mothers, until today the managers in many cities depend upon the policewomen in emergencies and accept their criticism of the films. The burlesque shows are a more difficult problem and sometimes moral suasion has been abandoned for such drastic action as the arrest of offenders on the stage. The problem of young people who roam about the streets or attend amusements late at night has led to a revival of the Curfew Law and policewomen are assigned to its enforcement. In Portland, Oregon, a penalty for negligent parents is included and the policewomen have met with marked success in educating the public in its observance. Although a smaller proportion of the policewomen patrol the parks, this is more often compelled by the inadequacy of the staff than by any lack of necessity for their supervision. Unquestionably the future will see an extension of their protective service to all the danger spots which menace youth.

The policewoman is not neglecting her rare opportunity to bridge the chasm between the police and the public, by describing the conditions which she finds to various local and national groups. The movement has had the endorsement of such bodies as the League of Women Voters, Daughters of the American Revolution, General Federation of Women's Clubs, and National Congress of Parents and Teachers, and the policewomen are strengthening these contacts locally. For instance, the policewoman in Berkeley, California, made 92 speeches last year, including four radio talks, and, by so doing, she inspired not only a better understanding of the police, but a vast amount of volunteer service for unfortunate individuals. In addition she meets each week with representatives of the local social agencies to discuss their common problems. Gradually, too, the policewomen are playing a more important part in supplying data and in making constructive recommendations for better legislation.

At best the policewoman's opportunity to expand the movement and develop professional standards is limited by her heavy duties and her confinement to one locality. This service must be given by a central agency, such as the International Association of Policewomen, with Headquarters in Washington. Through its medium a monthly Bulletin is published and pages are supplied to the Police Journal, the Woman Citizen and other magazines. Speakers, technical advice and field work are rendered to cities which desire to establish

or improve the policewoman's service. The placement of policewomen is furthered, and training courses in colleges and schools of social work are encouraged. Just at present the Association is organizing a lay membership of one thousand advisors and sponsors, men and women of prestige from all parts of the country, who will understand and encourage the policewoman's movement and support financially the educational work of the Association. Lady Astor is International Chairman, Mrs. Haley Fiske, National Chairman, Mr. William Fellowes Morgan, Treasurer, and among the women of note who have already accepted sponsorship are Mrs. William E. Borah, Mrs. Medill McCormick, Mrs. Frank Vanderlip, Mrs. Gifford Pinchot, Mrs. Josephus Daniels and Mrs. Robert Lansing. The educational value of such a group cannot be over-estimated and undoubtedly they will come to feel a deeper interest in their local police service as time goes on. If the American public is going to follow the advice of Calvin Coolidge and "let administration catch up with legislation," they will find no government department so much in need of their understanding and support as the police, and no field so rich in possibilities for the prevention of crime and the better protection of the under-privileged.