

Police . . . old and new

A History of Police in England and Wales 900-1966

T. A. CRITCHLEY

Constable 50s. 0d.

The Gentle Arm of the Law Life as a Policewoman

JENNIFER HILTON

Educational Explorers 21s. 0d.

WHILE IT MAY BE necessary, these days, to employ a public relations officer at New Scotland Yard and to use the skills and arts of world-famous designers to clothe our women police officers, no one with any knowledge of our colleagues in the police forces would deny that, when all is said and done, it is the character and personality of the man or woman behind the uniform which not only creates public interest in the Force but sustains the Force if and when public opinion is subjected to pressures not always beneficial to service morale or public confidence. The same is true of the Prison Service but we have not as yet been able to present such a clear picture of our aims. "The primary object of an efficient police is the prevention of crime . . ."; the words of Sir Richard Mayne, one of Peel's first Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police, was an admirable opening sentence for the first instructions to the newly-joining constables of 1829 whose life and duties

are described (with the painstaking attention to detail one might have expected from a Victorian photographer) by Mr. Critchley: it was still the opening sentence of the sergeant who was Miss Hilton's instructor in 1955. Just over 100 years separated the constables, in their blue tailed coat, blue trousers (white trousers optional in summer) and a glazed black top-hat strengthened with a thick leather crown, from the policewoman who even in 1955 had a smart, made-to-measure uniform.

Mr. Critchley, who was Principal Private Secretary to Mr. R. A. Butler, then Home Secretary, from 1957-60, writes penetratingly of the "long hours of toil and tedium, aching feet, boredom and blisters, coarse jokes over a mug of tea, countless brawls in streets and pubs, more foot-slogging by moonlight or starlight with a lantern searching down a dark alleyway, a sergeant breathing down a man's neck on morning parade,

the stink of police cells when tramps are unlocked on a fine summer's morning, wearing in a new pair of boots, issue of a whistle instead of a rattle, the chase after a youth when a man finds himself out of breath at 40 and begins to see the end, the longed-for day of release on a small pension if luck or ill-health earn it after all: it is surely possible for the policeman of today to catch a faint breath of the daily routine of the policeman in Queen Victoria's time . . .".

Miss Hilton joined when she was 20 years of age, having had some slight experience of social work in an East End settlement. She describes her training at Peel House . . . 15 male trainees to three girls . . . "we are either spoilt or persecuted on courses—never ignored" . . . a sentiment which may well be echoed by women prison officers. Five years later Miss Hilton was a sergeant and in 1965, 10 years after joining, she was on a course for qualification to inspector rank. Shortly she takes up a two-year teaching posting to the staff of the National Police College at Bramshill. Her concept of her work is that the usefulness of police duty "lies somewhere between that of doctors and dustmen".

"Policewomen", she says, "fit into the pattern of policing, not by catching criminals (although many find this interesting) which can usually just as well be done by

the men, nor by searching women prisoners, which could just as well be done by a matron, but by providing a link with, and to some extent supplementing the social services".

Miss Hilton's book, which is in the "My Life and Work" series and a companion volume to Nicholas Tyndall's *Prison People*, is good background reading for any young lady who thinks she just might be interested in becoming a police-woman. Certainly after reading this modestly expressed, purely personal account, no one will be put off; rather will their interest be stimulated. From a purely Prison Service angle, it is interesting to have the comments of an intelligent and observant "professional" colleague on our own establishments. She says some of her training class went to Holloway . . . "I felt I had seen quite enough of this grim place when, dressed in plain clothes, I had taken a prisoner there and almost been incarcerated myself! I put myself down for the trip to Hill Hall, a women's open prison. Set in rolling countryside beyond Epping Forest, this is a pleasant place in wide grounds. The groups of prisoners looked pale and plump as though fed extensively on starch. It was rather like a subdued girls' boarding school, except for the babies in prams in the cloisters, until I read the regulations in one of the dormitories and found (medieval touch) that they could still be punished

with three days' bread and water". She adds that the course made her more aware of the methods of treatment available, or lacking, for the people arrested by the police and taken before the courts. She began to feel that reform was more difficult than prevention, and solutions would only be found in the criminal's background.

This is the sort of book which police forces will use for recruitment purposes, and it should perform a useful public relations function for the police as a national institution.

Mr. Critchley's 347 pages of quite small type represents a major study of the whole police system in England and Wales, as compared with Miss Hilton's 115 pages of very readable, larger type, and his work on this subject may very readily be compared, and not unfavourably, with the late Sir Lionel Fox's book on the prisons and borstals. Both, though at first glance rather formidable, turn out to be very much easier reading than one would have imagined, and there are quite a few flashes of humour and a pleasant taste in selecting anecdotes and quotations. There is a particularly fascinating chapter beginning with the sentence: "Police history would almost certainly have taken a different course had Churchill remained at the Home Office to direct the police and not the Navy, after 1914". The same might be said about the Prison Service. A few years before

the battle of Sydney Street (when armed policemen and soldiers fought a battle with two Russian anarchists, whose gang had already murdered two policemen and maimed two others, and Mr. Churchill himself "directed" operations for a period and was much criticised for so doing) the police service had been having internal trouble, much of it over the "right to confer" and Mr. Critchley tells the story of Inspector Syme who, as a young officer, had shown great promise but later fell out with his superiors, accusing them of oppression and injustice. Syme, as an enquiry many years later showed, had right on his side but lacked discretion. He inspired agitation in the Press and in Parliament, was disciplined and dismissed. He then embarked on a vendetta against the Commissioner, published libellous pamphlets, and associated with Kempster, founder of the *Police Review*. In 1913, Syme started a clandestine union, the Metropolitan Police Union, afterwards styled the National Union of Police and Prison Officers. His later career was punctuated by spells of prison sentences for criminal libel and for trying to cause disaffection among the police in wartime. He was frequently on hunger strike and was eventually admitted to Broadmoor. The Government awarded him substantial compensation in 1931 but by then his mind was affected

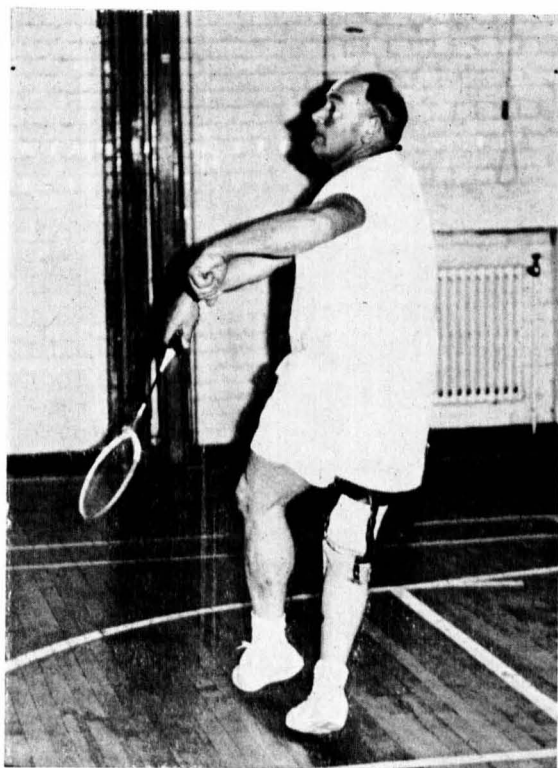
and he ended his days throwing bricks through the windows of the Home Office. He died in 1955.

The "right to confer" and many other points of grievance were eventually dealt with . . . and so police history is made. Newly joining police (and prison) officers of today accept the benefits of history: it is rather sad that we do not always give credit to the men whose lives and struggles were the

flesh and bones of history. Mr. Critchley's book is the first full-length history for nearly 70 years, and Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Jacob, in the Newsam Memorial Lecture at the Police College said: "At times it seems like a work of fiction, so hard is it to believe that some of the events really happened".

No historian needs a better recommendation.

M. W.



What is the link between the borstal at Hatfield and Mr. Ralph Speight, of Doncaster, here pictured playing badminton?