

2 SHAPING THE MAN ON THE BEAT

Behind the London and New York police images stood the men who patrolled the streets and performed many other duties. The commanders of the forces sought to mold these heterogeneous groups to their conceptions of how a policeman should present himself to the public. The type of men recruited, where they lived and what they wore, the standards of conduct they were expected to maintain, and the training and discipline given them to inculcate and uphold these standards all contributed to the public image of the police. The combination of these factors into personal and impersonal authority rested on an important question. Where would the balance be struck between the patrolman's ties to the community, which were necessary for effective police work, and his detachment, which was necessary for impartial law enforcement? Both integration and separation were essential elements of police authority, and neither London nor New York stressed one at the entire expense of the other. However, London's impersonal authority placed greater emphasis on detachment from the citizens to maintain professional impartiality, while New York's personal authority originally stressed closeness to the community, although the policeman became more separated from the citizens after 1857.

THE POLICEMAN AND HIS NEIGHBORS: RECRUITMENT AND RESIDENCY

The London commissioners sought to submerge the individual recruit's personality into an institutional personality. They knew just the sort of men they wanted: individuals who were superior physically, intellectually, and temperamentally to most members of the working classes from which recruits were drawn. They required

prospective bobbies to be of better than average health and strength, and the minimum height requirement of five feet seven inches exceeded the stature of most Englishmen. Although there was some flexibility in the first years in order to accommodate well-qualified former soldiers and to absorb members of old forces into the new police, the commissioners kept the minimum age requirement of twenty-two and maximum of thirty-five (lowered to thirty in 1839). The education requirement called for the applicant's demonstrated comprehension of what he read and wrote. Finally, candidates had to be even-tempered and reserved, middle-class qualities not often found among the Victorian working classes: "A hot temper would never do; nor any vanity which would lay a man open to arts of flirtation; nor too innocent good-nature; nor a hesitating temper or manner; nor any weakness for drink; nor any degree of stupidity." They had to produce detailed recommendations from "respectable" people, who, as the result of many dishonest references in the early years, were also investigated. Only about one-third of the applicants survived the initial examination and many of the survivors fell by the wayside in subsequent interviews and the final appearance before Rowan and Mayne.¹

Since the men were to be agents of impersonal authority, the commissioners expected them to be free from local or class ties which would compromise their impartiality. Rowan and Mayne wanted them to be free from "improper connections" with local residents that might create cross-pressures and thus cause the men to be indecisive and unable to do their duty. One important way of avoiding improper local connections was the recruitment of men from outside London, which allowed local residents to become acquainted with bobbies only in their police role and eliminated weakening of their authority because of previous local ties. Historians, relying on a commissioner's statement to a researcher in 1914, have said that from the first days of the force Rowan and Mayne preferred agricultural laborers as recruits. Geoffrey Gorer has assumed that the 40 percent of the Metropolitan Police in 1832 who had formerly been laborers were countrymen, but they were most likely urban because the commissioners limited recruiting to parishes of the Metropolitan District (largely urban and suburban), which supported the force from taxes. In 1837 Rowan said that they "never expressed any preference to one place over another from whence to fill up vacancies in the Police." Countrymen often made good

bobbies, but they were troublesome because they soon left the force after finding out how difficult the duty was.²

By 1840 Rowan and Mayne seem to have preferred country recruits. Now Rowan believed that countrymen made “the best Police men.” Although they took longer to train, they had “not so much to *unlearn*” as urbanites, suggesting a later observer’s remark that “your sharp Londoner makes a very bad policeman; he is too volatile and conceited to submit himself to discipline.” This commentator asserted that “eight-tenths” of the force came from outside London. I have not found official records to verify his claim, but of forty-one policemen who testified before the Hyde Park disturbances investigation in 1855, only three were natives of the Metropolitan District and even they did not hail from the central city. The rest came from all over England, with a sprinkling of Scots and Irish.³

Quite likely most of these men were not agricultural laborers, for our previously quoted observer stated that “the best constables come from the provincial cities and towns. They are both quicker and more ‘plucky’ than the mere country-man fresh from the village.” Agricultural laborers, one of the most depressed social groups of the period, “mere labourers, who require only bodily power, and possess little or no mental development,” were not the men the commissioners wanted. Later in the 1860s, however, when police pay increasingly lagged behind skilled workers’ wages, they seem to have accepted more agricultural laborers.⁴

Recruitment from outside of London brought strangers into neighborhoods where the inhabitants would come to know them as policemen rather than as private individuals. Once the men were assigned to a division the commissioners required them to live in the area, partly for convenience and as a means for them to gain the necessary local knowledge, but also to enable their superiors to keep an eye on them. The men were expected to lead exemplary private as well as public lives, never forgetting that they were policemen. Single men were quartered in “section houses,” or small barracks (a section comprised nine men under a sergeant’s command). In the early years Rowan and Mayne believed that the officers should be kept together to avoid conflicts with a hostile public, to aid in assembling them at central points in emergencies, and to prevent them from “associating with others that might be mischievous.” If the bachelors were not under their superiors’ eyes, “they might perhaps cohabit with women of the town and act in various ways . . . injurious” to the image of the

force. This concern was important in the early thirties, when most of the bobbies were single, but by 1834 two-thirds of them were married and that proportion held through the sixties. The commissioners preferred married men because of their stability and allowed them to rent their own quarters but required them to live within their divisions and submit to inspections of their lodgings.⁵ Rowan and Mayne expected the men to be a credit to the force off as well as on duty.

Centralization of the force also reduced local influences on the bobbies. Rowan and Mayne frequently transferred men from their divisions. They also required the men to report all gifts they received from citizens; these could be accepted only with the commissioners' consent.⁶ The commissioners established a system of small rewards for efficiency and good conduct to reduce the temptation of corruption. This is not to say that the bobby was incorruptible, for patrolmen and superior officers alike seem to have accepted payoffs from the proprietors of high-class gambling dens and whorehouses to ignore the law, and the image of the constable as extorter of small "tips" persists in working-class music-hall songs. Moreover, the police seemed eager to apprehend thieves when large rewards were offered, but dilatory when profits were slight.* Nevertheless, London's police

*Some orders on gifts and rewards are included in PO, December 21, 1829, Mepol 7/1, fol. 152; September 17, 1831, *ibid.*, fol. 270; December 13, 1836, Mepol 7/4, fol. 332; February 28, 1838, Mepol 7/5, fol. 308; and January 25, 1844, Mepol 7/9, fol. 234. For the problem of corruption, see charges regarding gambling houses in "Principles of Police, and Their Application to the Metropolis," *Fraser's Magazine* 16 (August 1837): 175n. (which places blame for accepting "hush money" on common informers rather than on the police). Other charges about police acceptance of payoffs from gamblers are in *Illustrated London News* 4 (May 11, 1844): 297. For brothels, see Humanitas, *A Letter to the Right Hon. Sir Robert Peel, Bart. . . . and Facts Demonstrative of His Intention to Subvert Public Liberty and Enslave the Country through the Espionage and Tyranny of the New Police. . . .* (London, [1835]), p. 17; and *Reynolds's Newspaper*, January 5, 1862, p. 4, and January 17, 1869, p. 4. In his documentary novel, *Fanny by Gaslight* (London, 1948), Michael Sadleir asserts that "In the 'sixties of the last century, the police—especially those responsible for the night-areas of London—were not the disciplined and virtually incorruptible force they have since become. Bribes were a matter of course, and the houses paid annual tribute according to their status and size, as well as providing free service on demand" (p. 71; see also pp. 55, 72, for examples). Regarding rewards, Edwin Chadwick's charge in 1830 that the police did not prevent thefts because they sought rewards for apprehension (draft of article, "Thoughts on Municipal Police," 1830, p. 2, in CP, box 2) is echoed in "Perpetual Motion," a music-hall song of the sixties (*Diprose's Music-Hall Song-Book* [London, 1862], p. 29). It is difficult to assess the amount of corruption. The commissioners pointed out that in both gambling and prostitution

force was not riddled with corruption to the degree of the New York police—largely, it seems, because Scotland Yard sought to minimize the opportunities.

New York police officials had a different concern from their London colleagues. Instead of worrying about too intimate ties with local residents, they originally conformed to democratic expectations that the police, in Mayor Varian's words, should be "but a part of the citizens."⁷ Although this localism was modified through the years, the New York force remained more closely tied to the community than did the London police.

The heads of the New York force expected applicants to meet physical and mental standards similar to those of the London police, but their democratic viewpoint did not foster strict adherence to them. An alderman was always willing to appoint an able-bodied supporter for a brief stint as a policeman without much concern about his qualifications. Political considerations made democratic antiprofessionalism into "rotation in office," less kindly known as the spoils system. Before the establishment of good-behavior tenure in 1853, a policeman could lose his job if an election did not go the right way or if he had antagonized his patron. Sometimes perseverance, as in the case of George W. Walling, who got himself appointed in another ward after a quarrel with his alderman, could overcome these obstacles.⁸

The three-man commission of 1853, though not as openly partisan as the aldermen, did not seem to have demanded much of prospective policemen. The commissioners were very casual in accepting or rejecting men, and, according to a critic, regulations such as the literacy requirement were "a dead letter," frequently "contemptuously evaded." Sometimes a man with good political connections had only to read a newspaper's title to prove his literacy. Adherence to standards seems to have improved under the state-controlled Metropolitan Police, but the force never shook off partisan politics.

the force's legal powers were limited (e.g. Rowan to Rev. Mr. Morris, July 13, 1841, Mepol 1/39, letter 83720; *PP*, 1870, vol. 36, Metro. Police Annual Report 1869, pp. 6, 11-12; *PP*, 1844, vol. 6, Gaming, Report, pp. vi-viii, and test. Mayne, p. 11). Many people must have assumed that police inactivity in these areas involved payoffs. James Grant, in the fourth edition of his *Sketches in London* (London, 1850), let stand a statement he had written in the first edition of 1838: "It is surprising in how few instances charges of corruption have been preferred, far less proved, against any of [the police]. . . . There seems to be a spirit of rivalry as to who shall be the most honest . . . as well as to who shall be the most active and enterprising among the body" (p. 392). Corruption undoubtedly existed, but it probably was not endemic.

The commissioners said in 1858 that “a judicious selection of officers as well as patrolmen, uninfluenced and unbiassed by the prejudices of the day, would tend greatly to remove any hostility that may exist against the department,” but charges of political favoritism in appointments persisted. Although concern for upholding standards of admission improved over the years, candidates never underwent anything like London’s thorough examination.⁹

The democratic wish to make the police “but a part of the citizens” influenced recruitment and residency policy. Under the laws of 1844 and 1853 policemen were required to have been residents for five years of the wards in which they would serve, and to continue living there while on the force. This provision, which made the patrolman into a local figure probably known to his neighbors before he joined the force, contrasted with the London commissioners’ concern to prevent “improper connections” between policemen and local residents. Although some critics complained that “familiarity breeds contempt,” most citizens considered the residency requirement perfectly proper and objected to occasional appointments of nonresident policemen. The requirement was generally, but not universally, enforced. In 1850 about two-thirds to three-fourths of the force lived in the ward in which they walked their beat and many of the nonresidents lived close by.¹⁰

The residency requirement provided policemen from the same ethnic groups as those found in the neighborhoods they patrolled. This was particularly true of the Irish, who entered the police force in large numbers through political patronage. The Germans, many of whom arrived in America with some capital and did not need police jobs to establish themselves, were not as well represented on the force. In 1855, the only year for which both sets of figures are available, 28 percent of New York’s population and 27 percent of the policemen were of Irish birth. Only 4 percent of the force represented the city’s 15 percent German population.¹¹ Table 1 reveals a close correlation between the proportion of Irish residents and Irish policemen in most wards, but less of a correspondence between German residents and policemen.

The Metropolitan Police Act of 1857 abolished the local residency requirement, specifying five years’ previous residency in the police district instead of the ward in which the patrolman served. Some New Yorkers argued that recruitment of men from Westchester or Staten Island to serve in Manhattan would destroy police efficiency, which had been based on knowledge of local criminals. Although many of

SHAPING THE MAN ON THE BEAT

these critics were undoubtedly sincere, others lamented the lost local political patronage. However, although the majority of policemen ceased to live in the ward of their beat, the Irish only temporarily lost their important position on the force. In 1857/58 the number of Irish-surname policemen in Irish wards dropped off steeply, but by 1860 the Irish approached former levels. Continued concern about residency may have been the factor that prompted a change in the rules in 1869, requiring policemen to live in the county (e.g., Manhattan) in which they served. It is hard to imagine many officers commuting from Queens or Westchester to serve in Manhattan, but

TABLE 1.
Nativity of Population and Policemen
by Ward, 1855, New York City

Ward	Percentage of Irish Population	Percentage of Irish Police	Percentage of German Population	Percentage of German Police
1	46	59	15	8
2	36	39	11	0
3	29	6	9	0
4	47	57	4	5
5	23	19	13	2
6	42	55	15	2
7	34	31	9	2
8	21	13	11	7
9	20	4	6	4
10	13	4	30	4
11	18	14	34	6
12	33	35	12	3
13	19	20	23	6
14	36	56	13	6
15	26	2	5	0
16	39	30	6	0
17	25	20	28	10
18	37	20	9	2
19	35	28	10	0
20	27	25	17	19
21	30	10	5	0
22	25	30	21	7

SOURCES: For the Irish, James F. Richardson, "The History of Police Protection in New York City, 1800-1870" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1961), p. 194. For German population, Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1865*, (New York, 1949), table 14, p. 193; for policemen, *BAD*, 1855, vol. 22, no. 43, Chief's Report on Police Nativity, p. 2. I rounded percentages to whole numbers in my computations.

there may have been Brooklyn or Staten Island commuters.¹² Although the Metropolitan Police District, or even Manhattan, was much larger than the ward as a source of recruits, the New York force remained more locally oriented than did the London police, which drew from all over the British Isles.

The Irishman who immigrated to New York had more opportunity of becoming a policeman than did his compatriot who settled in London. London's old night watch had been heavily Irish, and people complained that "Charlies" ignored brawls among Irishmen. Perhaps for this reason Mayne objected to stationing Irish bobbies in Irish neighborhoods. He was also concerned that police pay would be inadequate to support the large families which Hibernians tended to have. In 1837 Mayne barred men with more than three children from entering the force. The number was reduced to two by 1860, but there was obviously, considering Victorian attitudes toward contraception, no restriction once a man was recruited. This policy may have been responsible for the declining number of Irishmen in the police: in 1834 they made up about 16 percent of the force; in 1855, about 7 percent. Although both these figures are higher than the 5 percent of Irish in London's population, Irishmen were not an important element of a police which, according to a contemporary, "has done much to purify and pacify the various Irish localities."¹³ For London's Irish, in contrast to their New York compatriots, the policeman was definitely not a local figure.

London's recruitment and residency policies reflected the commissioners' concern to preserve professional impartiality by making patrolmen somewhat aloof from the communities in which they served. New York's original democratic concern to make the police close to the citizens was modified by reformers seeking to professionalize the force, but the patrolman never became as detached from the local community as his counterpart in London.

THE MAN IN BLUE

The patrolman's uniform was, of course, the most visible feature of his public image; it clothed the man in an anonymous institutional garb. The uniform not only identified the policeman on sight to citizens seeking his aid and reminded potential criminals of the police presence, but it also controlled policemen's actions by making any irregular activities visible to superior officers and civilians. The type of uniform he wore—or whether he wore one at all—revealed much about the nature of the policeman's authority.

SHAPING THE MAN ON THE BEAT

The London commissioners uniformed their men to make them easily identifiable, both to help prevent crime by a visible police presence and to alleviate fears that the new police would be a secret "Continental spy system." However, they could not make the uniform too military, for that would arouse fears of the force as a standing army. Peel and the commissioners, in private and unrecorded discussions, decided on a blue uniform modeled on civilian dress. They dropped a proposed red outfit as too military. Bobbies took to the streets in 1829 wearing a blue tailcoat and trousers, a greatcoat for bad weather, boots, and a leather top hat, the crown of which contained supports so the patrolman could use it as a stool for peering over walls. Each man wore an identification letter and number on his coat collar. Reflecting current civilian fashions, the outfit was quite modest compared to gaudy military attire. With some modifications, including adoption of the modern helmet in 1864, the London bobby's uniform remained the same throughout the mid-nineteenth century. Some of the old forces had been partly uniformed, but the appearance of so many uniformed men on the streets was a new experience.¹⁴

At first many people physically and verbally attacked the uniformed men, confirming a prediction that they would "get marked and hooted at" because the outfit, whatever form it took, would border too much on "military array." The men themselves seemed to share these sentiments, for in the early days many of them wore their greatcoats in all weather to hide the uniform. Rowan and Mayne were "sorry to think that any of the police force can be so ashamed of the uniform of the body into which they have voluntarily entered." By 1834 the men had accepted uniforms, "except some dandies who would always be desirous of wearing plain clothes." Bobbies had to live with the uniform both on and off duty so they could be identified at all times and not be suspected of spying in plain clothes. Men on duty wore armbands so that off-duty men in uniform would not be suspected of negligence when they were on their own time.¹⁵

The uniform was a key element in Rowan's and Mayne's emphasis on prevention of crime: police visibility was an important deterrent, and the uniform served a "scarecrow function." Clearly, however, visibility hindered much necessary detective work which had to be secret, and the commissioners made exceptions in special cases to their requirement that the uniform be worn at all times. Nevertheless, Rowan and Mayne, particularly Mayne, had persistent doubts about extensive employment of plainclothesmen. They had been

burned by the "Popay incident" of 1833, in which an overzealous patrolman in plain clothes joined the radical National Political Union and acted as an agent provocateur. The episode raised fears of the "Continental spy system," and the commissioners seem, with a few lapses, to have heeded the parliamentary investigators' warning that employment of plainclothesmen

affords no just matter of complaint, while strictly confined to detect breaches of the law and to prevent breaches of the Peace, should these ends appear otherwise unattainable; at the same time the Committee would strongly urge the most cautious maintenance of those limits, and solemnly deprecate any approach to the Employment of Spies, in the ordinary acceptance of the term, as a practice most abhorrent to the feelings of the people, and most alien to the spirit of the constitution.¹⁶

Subsequently the commissioners, although they created a small specialized detective division in 1842 and expanded detective activity in succeeding years, continued to emphasize the primacy of prevention and to worry about accusations of spying. Mayne sought to make detective duty as temporary as possible, rotating the men to reduce the opportunities for corruption, always a risk because of the dependence on criminal contacts for information. He also insisted that plainclothesmen identify themselves to citizens when making arrests.¹⁷

Mayne's successor, Henderson, who took office after a crime wave in the later sixties, placed more emphasis on detection. He expanded the central detective force and created permanent divisional detectives, also abolishing the regulation that the men wear their uniforms off duty. Surely Mayne must have at least stirred in his grave, under the handsome monument paid for by police subscription, when in 1877 the three highest officials of the Central Detective Division were exposed as accomplices of an international ring of swindlers.¹⁸

Until the last years covered in this study, the commissioners made the uniform a vital element of police authority, separating the men from the public both on and off duty, symbolizing the force's emphasis on prevention rather than detection of crime, and helping to alleviate fears of a secret spy network. The uniform became the symbol of impersonal authority, according to an American observer, giving the bobby a "great *moral power*" which "lies in *his coat*."¹⁹

New Yorkers had little reason to fear that their police force would

SHAPING THE MAN ON THE BEAT

become a political spy system. Instead, the democratic desire to make the force “but a part of the citizens” originally dictated that policemen dress like citizens. The law establishing the Municipal Police explicitly rejected uniforms and required only a star-shaped copper badge which could be concealed if necessary.²⁰ Though lawmakers had often spoken of the need for preventive police, they did not fully implement the concept when they created a plainclothes force.

New York had briefly experienced a uniformed police and generally found it distasteful. The short-lived, nativist “Harper’s Police” of 1844 had worn a blue uniform with the letters “M.P.” (Municipal Police) on the collar, which could be turned down to conceal the officer’s identity. The men and the public equally objected to the simple outfit, bystanders booing and stoning the “liveried lackeys” of the nativists when the new force appeared at a fire in the Bowery Theatre. Democratic success in the next election ended the experiment, which left a lingering hatred of uniformed policemen.²¹

Despite the discredit of Harper’s Police, proponents of a uniform considered visibility essential if the force were to be truly preventive. They agreed with the London commissioners’ emphasis on the uniform’s identification, deterrent, and disciplinary functions, which were lacking in the plainclothes force which took to the streets in 1845. Citizens could not identify policemen when they needed aid and sometimes found themselves knocked to the ground or hauled off to jail when they got into altercations with strangers who turned out to be patrolmen. In one case a black woman struggled against a policeman who accosted her because she thought he was a kidnapper seeking to return her to slavery. Such complaints diminished after Chief Matsell ordered the men to wear their “stars” conspicuously when on the beat and the mayor punished violators of the order. Lack of a uniform apparently became more harmful to policemen than to anybody else, for James W. Gerard pointed out that the high number of assaults on policemen in 1852 reflected the lack of moral authority a uniform would provide.²²

Policemen themselves, however, were the most persistent opponents of a uniform. They invoked a widespread distaste for servants’ livery and fears that the uniform would convert the people’s police into a tyrannical standing army, all this probably influenced by bad memories of Harper’s nativist regime and by anti-English sentiment. One orator thundered, “No man bearing the proud title of an American desire[s] to appear in any dress that should make him

conspicuous among his fellows,” recalling Tocqueville’s remark that democrats resented any visible signs of power or privilege which set men off from the mass.²³

In the face of such opposition, the uniform was not finally adopted until almost ten years after the force was established. Reformers like James W. Gerard won Chief Matsell’s support, and a simple blue uniform was adopted in 1853 over the men’s protests. Though the protests were loud, they were unavailing, for the commissioners who were established by the 1853 reorganization dismissed some of the leaders of the antiuniform movement. The commissioners resented being, in their own words, “held up to ridicule and contempt” for “imposing an expensive and fantastical uniform.” Chief Matsell credited the uniform with all that its advocates had expected of it: “The uniform dress has proved to be of incalculable benefit to the department in regard to its efficiency and respectability.” The men were better disciplined, their moral authority had increased, and their visibility helped prevent crime. As Gerard predicted, assaults on policemen, at least as measured by arrest figures, decreased after the men donned their uniforms.²⁴

Even after adoption of a uniform, New York officials did not share Rowan’s and Mayne’s wariness about plainclothes detectives. Both Municipal and Metropolitan Police regulations repeated the London instructions that “the principal object to be attained is *‘the prevention of crime’*” and that police efficiency should be measured by the absence of crime rather than a high number of arrests. However, these instructions were buried in the text instead of appearing at the beginning of the rule book.²⁵ Consequently the policeman would not have the principle of prevention hammered home to him as his first duty.

The police were free to emphasize detection because, although there was popular suspicion of detectives, no widespread fear of a secret police or spy system was materializing in America. Also, to a certain extent New York officials were forced to rely on detection because of a shortage of manpower. Successful prevention depends greatly on the visibility of many uniformed men, and the New York force, with one officer per 812 people, was small compared to the London police, with one bobby per 351 citizens in 1856. The problem of inadequate strength continued into the sixties under the Metropolitan Police.²⁶ The importance of detectives in New York seems to have reflected both choice and necessity.

Emphasis on detection in both the Municipal and Metropolitan

SHAPING THE MAN ON THE BEAT

forces introduced problems. Detailment for detective work, which was generally more profitable as well as more healthy than pounding the beat, became a means of rewarding political fidelity. Metropolitan Police captains selected their favorites to "work up" all reported robberies, but if these cases produced no leads or involved only small amounts of property they were "loftily refused and turned over to a patrolman." Such favoritism bred rivalry and destroyed incentive. Moreover, detectives revived an evil of the old police system: recovery of property by collusion with the thief. A journalist urged that "In some way the attention of the police officer must be diverted from the property stolen to the person stealing it." The detective force seems to have been a little empire of its own within the police, one which retained the entrepreneurial competitiveness that had been typical of the old police forces attached to the courts.²⁷

The New York police, originally concerned with integration into the local community and unsuspected of secret political spying, at first rejected a uniform as incompatible with democratic authority. But the growing need for visibility and deterrence, combined with reformers' efforts to professionalize the force, finally led to adoption of a uniform. The change, however, did not fully implement Rowan's and Mayne's emphasis on prevention over detection of crime. Their concern depended greatly on the uniform as a symbol of police power, which was national instead of merely local as in New York. The bobby's uniform invoked more of the "dignified" or symbolic aspect of government than did that of the New York cop. The uniformed patrolman had more symbolic power than his plainclothes predecessor, but impersonal dignity took second place to personal efficiency as embodied in the plainclothes detective.

BEHAVIOR AND DISCIPLINE

Recruitment and residency policies and the uniform contributed to the police image, but more important for public response was how policemen behaved and how effectively their commanders upheld the standards of conduct they set for the force. Official ideals of behavior were important, but they could be meaningless without discipline directed at maintaining them.

So far I have emphasized the London commissioners' concern to prevent local ties from interfering with police impartiality. Would this separation increase public hostility by causing the force to become ingrown, isolated from the public with its own subculture? It was quite possible that the bobbies, facing intense hostility in the

early years, would regard citizens as antagonists and become hostile to them in turn. An early critic warned that “by taking their whole time, and appointing them to reside together in Station-houses, the individuals composing the force are as completely separated from the rest of the community as are the soldiers; and, in the course of a little time, will become a band of men having a strong *esprit du corps*, with nothing to link them to the rest of their fellow citizens.”²⁸ Rowan and Mayne, though they wanted to develop solidarity among the men, were aware of this danger.

One way to prevent social isolation from turning into mutual hostility was the commissioners’ insistence that policemen be models of restraint and politeness. They scrutinized the bobbies’ smallest actions in order to minimize friction with the public. In the early days of the force they reiterated orders against rude answers to citizens’ questions, shouldering people aside when walking through crowds, provocation into physical or verbal abuse, failure to show an identification number on request, and a host of minor irritants such as loud conversations when two men were patrolling together or noisy behavior in the section houses. These orders suggest that policemen indeed committed the offenses mentioned, but the commissioners’ continuing vigilance is indicated by incorporation of some of them into the permanent standing orders and repetition of them when infractions cropped up in later years.²⁹ By monitoring the men’s behavior in large and small matters the commissioners hoped to prevent a force separated from the community from becoming an irritating and hostile presence. They seem to have expected good behavior to compensate for distance from local residents and to win respect if not friendship.

Enunciating standards of conduct and drumming them into the ears of the men was one thing; maintenance of them in practice was another, more difficult task. A contemporary remarked, “As is the case with all large communities, the police force must include in its number men malicious, prejudiced, wrong-headed and foolish.” Such men had to be controlled by more than exhortation; the answer was strict military discipline, which would have been frightening if it were not directed toward minimizing friction with the public. Discipline, which created sort of an automatic policeman, was a key element of impersonal authority: “The policeman, ‘too clever by half,’ is generally an instrument of injustice, and an impediment in the way of the law’s impartial acting. So long as the common constable remains a well-regulated machine, and fulfils his functions

SHAPING THE MAN ON THE BEAT

without jarring or unnecessary noise, we will ask no more." Rowan and Mayne would have agreed with the journalist who said, "The police, like soldiers, when they know they are strictly watched by their officers, will acquire good conduct and regularity; they are at first raw, like soldiers, but by drilling them, and acquainting them with the manner in which they are to perform their duty, and having intelligent men to instruct them, the effect on the body generally will be highly beneficial."³⁰

Making the policeman into "a well-regulated machine" was important because the commissioners presided over a very transitory body of men. In 1860 the average length of service was only four years, hardly enough time to allow thorough absorption of the commissioners' ideals of conduct. The principal cause of high turnover in the early years was dismissal for misconduct—mainly drunkenness, toward which the commissioners showed no mercy. Later the principal problem was voluntary resignations of good men because of low pay. The Home Office rather stingily controlled police salaries and, although Rowan and Mayne pressed for raises, the pay of entering patrolmen remained at nineteen shillings per week. This was better than the pay of unskilled urban and rural workers but was not competitive with artisans' wages. Experience in the police was an avenue of mobility for many able men who had no skills when they entered the force. If they received a favorable "character" from the commissioners they had good chances of moving into skilled occupations. Many skilled recruits joined the force in bad times as a temporary refuge until they could return to their usual occupations. A bobby said in 1830, "If I had not been miserably reduced, you would not have seen me in such a situation as this"; in 1868 "the most intelligent" policemen saw their job "as a mere resource against want, to be retained only till something better presents itself." By 1839, bobbies who did stay on were eventually eligible for a pension and for raises according to merit and length of service, but low pay caused discontent and prompted a small strike in 1872. Mayne pointed out that, as in the Dublin police, higher salaries encouraged the men to value their positions, and their concern to retain them made them perform their duties more conscientiously.³¹ Low pay and consequent turnover did not foster a tightly knit organization which would develop loyalty to ideals of conduct. Strict discipline was necessary to maintain them.

Sir Robert Peel had appointed Col. Charles Rowan on the strength of Wellington's recommendation of him as having brought his

regiment “to a high state of discipline.” Mayne increasingly adopted Rowan’s views as the best way to control the force, and in his last years a subordinate said “there never was a stricter disciplinarian.” His successor, Henderson, an army officer and prison official, seems to have carried discipline even further, giving the force “a greater military smartness throughout” and appointing assistant commissioners “whose ideas savour more of the barrack than of the police station.” The commissioners’ discipline rested on thorough centralization of the force, reliance on a nucleus of committed superior officers promoted from the ranks, and responsiveness to public complaints of police misconduct. The result may have been too much discipline—the men “were kept in such a state of subordination that they hardly dare say a word of their own”—but strictness was apparently necessary to maintain the standards of conduct the commissioners demanded.³²

Rowan organized the new police along military lines, from the home secretary at the top, who rarely interfered with police policy, through the commissioners, who were the chief executive officers of the force, and then to the superintendents in charge of divisions containing thousands of inhabitants, inspectors in command of individual station houses, and sergeants heading sections of nine patrolmen each. In the early years the commissioners liked to appoint former noncommissioned military officers to the higher ranks of the police because of their ability to maintain discipline. Subsequently, however, there were very few former military men, because superior officers were promoted from police ranks. Rowan and Mayne required superior officers to consider themselves loyal primarily to Scotland Yard rather than to the men under their command. While they warned against too strict discipline, the commissioners expected officers to maintain enough distance from their men so that their authority would not be weakened by personal ties—this was analogous to the impartiality they expected patrolmen to maintain toward the public. They prohibited business relations between officers and men, and favoritism in assigning duties.³³

As for the men, they had to obey all orders “readily and punctually” and could hope for promotion only by following the maxim that “he who has been accustomed to submit to discipline will be considered best qualified to command.” They could complain to the commissioners if they thought any orders illegal or improper, but only after they had obeyed them: “Any refusal to perform the commands of his superiors, or negligence in doing so, will not be

suffered." Inspectors and sergeants kept their eyes on bobbies for any infractions of the rules or neglect of duty; discipline extended to minor forms of protocol such as saluting.³⁴

Training before entering upon police duties was an important part of discipline, but it was very slight by modern standards. In the early years bobbies received instruction in military drill for riot duty and some examination on the rules and regulations before they went out on patrol. Most of their knowledge, however, had to be picked up from experienced policemen or learned by trial and error. By the 1850s the commissioners increased the amount of drill and thoroughly examined the men on the instruction book, also requiring them to attend the police courts to learn the art of presenting evidence. By 1870 bobbies had to spend a week in the station house reserve and another week patrolling the streets with an experienced officer before going on duty alone.³⁵

Rowan said that fear of dismissal and hope of promotion constituted the basis of discipline. Dismissals were highest in the first two decades, averaging annually some 10 percent of the force from 1834 to 1848. Reflecting declining police drunkenness, fewer public charges of police misconduct, and introduction of fines for minor infractions, dismissals for all causes remained between 4 and 5 percent of a much larger police force in the 1850s and 1860s.³⁶

All of the various methods of discipline described so far sought to make a force that was distant from the local community and that consisted of many sojourners conform to standards laid down by the commissioners. Rowan and Mayne also helped bridge the gap between policeman and public by their procedure in handling civilian complaints. They were grateful to "all respectable persons" who sought redress of police misconduct, offering complainants the choice of a private hearing at Scotland Yard or an appearance before a magistrate. Most people chose the private hearing, which involved less time and expense, although the commissioners referred all serious cases of improper arrest or violence to a magistrate. Charles Reith has found their handling of complaints fair and impartial, but it should be pointed out that the burden of proof was squarely on the complainant. Many people received the reply that was given to a boy clubbed at a Chartist meeting, "the polite intimation that if the man could be identified, every assistance should be rendered." Rowan and Mayne ran a tight ship, and the complaint procedure probably was of most benefit to "respectable" people with time and energy to have their grievances redressed.³⁷ Nevertheless, the commissioners'

willingness to hear complaints with a minimum of red tape allowed them to punish improper behavior which otherwise might have escaped notice.

The London commissioners had insisted on strict standards of behavior to counteract any antagonism arising from the policeman's isolation from the public. In New York, with the force integrated into the community until 1857 and still not as separate afterward as the police in London, a need to overcome the potential dangers of police isolation was not an incentive for behavioral standards maintained by strict discipline.

Both the Municipal and Metropolitan Police instruction books repeated Rowan's and Mayne's insistence on coolness and impartiality in performing police duties, but discipline does not seem to have been strong enough to maintain the ideals consistently. Mayor Mickle warned that "Every policeman . . . must possess civility and a proper control of temper, or he will bring himself into disgrace and the whole department into disrepute," but Municipal Police officials seem to have tolerated a more rough-and-ready style than would have been acceptable in London. Mayors, who performed the London commissioners' disciplinary functions until 1853, tended to impose lighter punishments on policemen against whom charges of brutality or illegal arrest were proved than did the London commissioners, favoring suspension from pay rather than dismissal. Except for their strict attitude toward drunkenness, they seem to have been more willing than Rowan and Mayne to overlook minor indiscretions. In one case a patrolman clubbed a man for insulting his wife, which in his own words "caused me to forget for the moment my position as a guardian of the public peace, and without reflection[,] being keenly impressed with the unprovoked outrage I had received in the person of my wife[,] I inflicted summary punishment upon him, and left him immediately." Mayor Kingsland dismissed the charge of brutality, observing that the policeman did not do "anything which a man should not do under such circumstances." Such loss of temper, even under provocation, would probably have received at least a reprimand from Rowan and Mayne.³⁸

Under the Metropolitan Police, newspapers increasingly complained of police brutality. The problem may reflect a decline in the quality of recruits. During the Civil War years, a period of rising wages and prices, police pay for the first time fell below the wages of skilled workers. Previously, skilled workers made up most of the

SHAPING THE MAN ON THE BEAT

recruits, but in the sixties they began resigning and replacements could be obtained only from the unskilled labor force. The commissioners asserted that a pay increase was necessary to prevent "a fatal deterioration in the character of the force," and a journalist said, "We have no right to look for saintliness in blue uniforms and pewter badges when their wearers receive but \$25 to \$30 a week." London had compensated for low pay and consequent turnover by strict discipline, but New York officials do not seem to have adopted their method. Although the Metropolitan commissioners were strict with departmental infractions such as neglect of duty, policemen themselves called the procedure for dealing with civilian complaints "trying the complainant." The previously quoted journalist said in 1869 that policemen "are compelled to associate with vulgarians and scoundrels of all grades; are exposed to every species of temptation; act unfavorably on each other, and have no restraining influence beyond their own intelligence, which is not very great, and their fear of exposure, which is not probable." Apparently policemen were not well-regulated machines like their London brethren, who were fairly certain of exposure and punishment if they stepped out of line.³⁹

An important reason for the discrepancy between ideals and practice, in addition to public expectations of the police (which will be discussed in chapter 6), was the force's involvement in partisan politics. Decentralization and political favoritism weakened discipline. Before 1853 patrolmen looked to local politicians for appointment and promotion. Consequently they were less amenable to their superior officers' orders, and friction developed which "soon ripened into the bitterest hatred and enmity, and which were carried out of the department into the private walks of life." Policemen participated in political clubs, often resigning to work for reelection of their aldermen, who left the positions vacant until they won the election and could reappoint the loyal patrolmen. Chief Matsell said that this politicking kept the department in "constant excitement." Discipline improved somewhat under the 1853 commission, which cut the tie to local aldermen and prohibited participation in political clubs. However, the commission had little chance to improve its effectiveness, for favoritism was rife under Mayor Fernando Wood, elected in 1854. Captains were not promoted from the ranks but "taken from the citizens, and placed over Lieutenants and Sergeants of ten years' experience, depressing the energies of the men." According to a critic of the Municipal Police,

discipline depended on the individual captain's "attention, or skill and tact." Patrolmen's only training was on the street after a stint of military drill.⁴⁰

The Metropolitan Police commissioners improved the force's discipline, and the law enacted in 1857 introduced the principle of promotion according to merit. Improved discipline and coordination in the early sixties aided police success in the draft riots. The commissioners believed that "the marked fidelity, vigilance, and efficiency of the police, in ordinary as well as extraordinary occasions, is the legitimate fruit of the system. Instead of fearing or despising the policeman, the public have learned to trust him as the protector and defender of social order." General Superintendent John A. Kennedy, who took office in 1860, introduced the rank of inspector to check on patrolmen's behavior. One contemporary thought that this surveillance made the force "attentive and efficient, as if by magic," so that New York had "the best police force in the world."⁴¹

However, problems caused by decentralization persisted, and grew worse by the end of the sixties when the force was caught up in Tweed Ring politics. Early superintendents complained that they had too little power over the men, that the commissioners made policy and the captains had a firm grip on the station houses. Superintendent Kennedy gained somewhat more autonomy but the captains continued to be independent, autocrats "who could, and many of them did, destroy whatever of efficiency headquarters had left."⁴² Personal authority seemed to reign in the department, the captain's personality and ability still being the most important factors in discipline.

Despite improvements of discipline, the New York force was never as closely controlled as the London police. Ideals of behavior were not as effectively bolstered by discipline to insure that they were carried out. The New York patrolman, with less institutional constraint, had more personal freedom than the London bobby. Far more than his London colleague, he was still "but a part of the citizens" despite modifications of the force's original democratic structure.

Recruitment, residency, the uniform, behavior, and discipline were fundamental aspects of the police image. It is now time to turn to the policeman in his active role as peacekeeper and law enforcer to see how the personal and impersonal images worked out in practice.