

**Copy of the general report of G. Borlase Childs ... on the dress of the City Police Force : addressed to the worshipful the Police Committee.**

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COPY OF THE

GENERAL REPORT

OF

G. BORLASE CHILDS, Esq., F.R.C.S., by Exam.,

ON

THE DRESS OF THE

CITY POLICE FORCE,

ADDRESSED TO THE WORSHIPFUL THE POLICE COMMITTEE.

1861.

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# REPORT.

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MEDICAL DEPARTMENT, CITY POLICE,  
*November 18th, 1861.*

TO THE  
WORSHIPFUL THE POLICE COMMITTEE.

MY LORD MAYOR AND GENTLEMEN,

Agreeable to your orders of the 30th ultimo, "to report generally upon the Dress of the Force, I have the honour to submit to you the following suggestions, drawn up in the form of a Report.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

G. BORLASE CHILDS, F.R.C.S.,  
*Surgeon to the Force.*

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I. It will no doubt be in the recollection of many members of your Committee, that in my evidence before the Commission appointed by the Crown to inquire into the sanitary condition of the Army, and to report thereon to both Houses of Parliament, of which Committee the late Lord Herbert



was President, I touched briefly on the subject of the clothing or dress of the Force of which I have charge as Surgeon—the Committee not deeming it necessary to pursue the inquiry in that direction. Had my opinion been taken on this subject, my evidence would have been similar to the views I now hold on this important matter ; so that the Report now presented to the Committee may be looked on as the complement of my evidence to the Parliamentary Commission.

II. Clothing suited to the necessities and the duties of any body of men expected to be efficient at all times, by night and day, is a matter of the highest importance. The badly clothed are always miserable, and generally inefficient, as is well known to military men. If to this be added a defective commissariat, the army or force becomes wholly useless, and speedily breaks up. Viewing this matter strictly with reference to the Police Force, it will, I think, be conceded, that the clothing should be such as—1, To protect the men from injury, and inclemency of weather ; 2, To interfere as little as possible with the movements of the men when called on to act, bearing in mind that these calls are not unfrequently sudden, unexpected, and more of the nature of emergencies : demanding the utmost courage, energy, and forbearance on the part of the men ; and, 3, The dress generally should be of such texture, colour, and form, as to give to the men that claim to respectability of appearance to which they are not only well entitled by their conduct, but which forms an essential element in the arrangements of social civilized life. If I have not spoken of economy, it is because, whenever injudiciously attempted to be carried out, it uniformly defeats its own objects. Unsuitable clothing



adds to the sick list ; maintains at a high rate the ratio of men in hospital or on that list ; deprives the Force of their services, thus throwing additional duties on the healthy ; and lays the foundation for an enlargement of the Pension list—the dead weight of every Force. I feel confident that the members of this Committee will be disposed to agree with me in these opinions, based as they are on much experience and long reflection.

III. The daily walk of the Policeman is about sixteen miles ; a few miles more is known to be above the power of any man. In addition, his walk is tedious, wearisome, monotonous. He cannot well rest, nor even vary his movements ; and, with his thoughts unemployed, he must yet be ever on the watch. Hence, in part, no doubt arises that very considerable amount of sickness, which, though not serious, is nevertheless constantly present in the Force, as I proved by figures, and explained to the satisfaction of the Parliamentary Committee. Considerations like these cannot be omitted in the question under review. In the meantime, as the Force has hitherto been efficient in the very highest degree, as proved by the evidence referred to (an evidence which served Lord Herbert as a lever, wherewith he overturned the entire system which prevailed prior to his taking office), it may reasonably be said, Why change or alter it in any way ? To this my reply is brief. The nation or the individual which advances not, retrogrades : and thus time forces changes upon all human affairs. Such changes may be improvements, or they may not ; that is a question to be solved, not by us, but by those who follow.

IV. *Details.*—Police dress consists of various parts, viz., hat, coat, trousers, underclothing, boots.



1. THE COVERING FOR THE HEAD.—In many respects the Policeman is a soldier; his enemy is the drunken, the debauched, the evil-disposed, the malicious, and those who, regarding him as their worst enemy, delight in injuring him. Against these, unhappily a numerous class, he must be ever on the watch. Cowardly by their nature and calling, they aim at his head. The importance, therefore, of affording him every protection for that vital part is apparent. Now the ancient Greeks, to whom we owe the arts, sciences, and civilization of the present day, placed on the head of the man exposed to danger a helmet, so exquisitely formed, so adapted to the object in view, as to leave nothing to be desired, and, as was to be expected, so elegant in appearance, that nothing has ever been imagined, since their era, at all approaching it. The helmet thus formed must ever be the basis of all head-gear, in respect of men exposed to danger from the attacks of others; and if, in the dress of modern infantry, its use has been discontinued, this arises simply from the introduction of firearms. The hat now worn by the Police Force fulfils no indication which the covering for the head of men so exposed requires. It affords no protection in a struggle, for it either immediately falls, or is struck off; and the man, becoming conscious that his head is exposed to great danger, hesitates, and begins to think only of self-defence. It is, moreover, heavy—weighing 14 ozs., even when dry; offers no protection to the eyes, face, ears, or neck; causes headaches, &c.; not being arched, it does not sufficiently, even if kept on, protect the head from a blow, no matter what may be its strength; whilst, as to appearance, it presents the additional absurdity of superadding a civilian's hat (the worst covering for the



head ever invented) to a semi-military dress. The present Police hat admits of no improvement. The Galeated head-dress of the ancient Greek requires none, but merely some modifications adapted to the circumstances of the case. Following Nature's design, to give the utmost possible protection to the brain, the Greeks gave to the helmet that arched form, proved to be the perfection of every arch. The Galea of the Greek, therefore, modified according to existing circumstances, and which I now submit to the Committee for their approval, as the *Britannia Hat*, seems to me to combine most of the advantages of that of the Greek. It is light, sits firmly on the head; is strong, arched, elegant in form; protects the eyes, neck, and, if required, the ears; and admits, by a ventilating chamber, of the escape of heat from the head of the wearer. The plume, or horse-hair tail, which surmounted the helmet of the Greek, was added by them not merely for ornament, but to deaden the edge of the assailing sword. It gives to the wearer a warlike, defiant look, not required in a civil force.

It is right to add, that for the present unsuitable hat worn by the London Police Force, a cap has already been substituted in some of the counties, as in Kent and Hampshire. But the cap is not handsome; it wants elevation, gives a mean, slouching air to the wearer, and affords no protection from external violence.

2. THE COAT, OR TUNIC.—The coatee worn at present by the Force is the relic of a past age; it affords no protection from wet or cold to the vital organs contained within the cavities of the abdomen and pelvis, nor does it afford covering or warmth to the haunches and limbs; in its place ought to be substituted a tunic, full, handsome, and provided



with ventilation in the arm-pits, and sufficiently warm to protect the wearer in our cold, damp, variable climate. In London, there are over 160 rainy days annually; to such a climate the Force is constantly exposed. Common sense tells us, that the tunic should be fitted to the chest so as not to impede respiration or motion, and of sufficient length and breadth in the skirts to afford as much warmth and protection from rain as possible. In many counties, the tunic has for some time been substituted for the ancient coatee, still worn in London. Improvement has in this instance reversed its usual course, which is generally expected to be from the metropolis to the provinces.

3. THE MODERN TROUSERS—invented, I believe, by the French—when made of good material, sufficiently elastic, has been proved to answer best. But the trousers, as generally made, do not give full protection to the joints. Of all the joints of the lower extremities, the knees are found most to suffer from cold and wet, and from the wear and tear of life. It is in this joint that we most frequently meet with that abrasion of the cartilages, and destruction of the synovial membrane—of that apparatus, in brief, which nature places in the joints to meet the constant friction to which, during the greater part of every day, they are exposed. The calf of the leg, being formed of a fleshy mass, and well supplied with blood, but rarely suffers from cold; but the shins, ankles, and feet, as well as the knees, are most obnoxious to such influences. Cold and damp, no doubt, aid in the production of rheumatism and other diseases of these parts, which, when severe, incapacitate men, otherwise in the prime of life and health, from the performance even of moderate exercise. To remedy this, it might be advisable



to strengthen the trousers on the inside, over the knee, in those especially who may be liable to rheumatism; and to afford the shins and ankles additional protection from wet by the use of waterproof leggings, worn *over* the trousers; but whatever plan be adopted, care must be taken, so as not to interfere with the circulation in the superficial veins of the limb.

4. UNDERCLOTHING.—In most European climates, and especially in England, underclothing ought to form an essential part of every man's dress. A preference, based on a widely extended experience, is given to flannel, as the best material for underclothing. When worn next the skin, although unpleasant at first, it fully compensates for this inconvenience, by maintaining the circulation equally throughout the surface, absorbing the perspiration, and never feels damp, but retains the moisture within its own texture. These qualities render such underclothing of great value, even in tropical countries. Against sudden changes of temperature, it is the only protection which can be given to men exposed by day and night to all atmospheric changes; and although, perhaps, but of small avail against those epidemical influences which in a short time strike down a whole population, it cannot fail to render such attacks less severe—the consequences less fatal. Each man, on joining the Force, should be called upon to provide himself with two flannel shirts, two pair of flannel drawers, and two Jerseys, one of each to be produced at every monthly examination of the kit.

V. THE CHAUSSURE.—What Xenophon, the celebrated military commander, historian, and philosopher, as well as a practical man in the strictest sense of the term, said, in



respect of the feet of the horse, is applicable to the soldier, and to the men composing the Force, whose future dress we now consider. "Look to the *feet*," observed the celebrated Greek, "in your choice of a horse; should these be faulty, reject the animal at once, whatever other good qualities it may have." A celebrated modern general said the same of the soldier; and, indeed, a moment's reflection will tell us that the maxim is based on common sense. In selecting men for the Force, I look well to the feet; when faulty, the candidate is rejected: hence the importance of a suitable chaussure—that is, a boot. But it is easier to imagine than to describe what a suitable boot should be, and still more difficult to invent one, as an unobjectionable chaussure has not yet been invented, either for man or horse. The celebrated Camper, immortalized by his invention of the facial angle, wrote an ingenious memoir on this subject, in which he gave many useful hints. Nor has the subject been neglected in modern times. My remarks on this part of the dress must necessarily be brief, and are offered merely as hints to the boot wearer and bootmaker, in hopes of inducing the latter to pay more attention to the but too often well-grounded complaints of the former.

All economical considerations in respect of the quality of the boot are strictly out of place. The leather should be of the best, the form of the foot studied by the bootmaker, and room left for that extension of the foot which, as first shown by Camper, takes place whenever the weight of the body is carried by the feet, whether in standing or walking. The slow, peculiar walk of the Policeman, added to the natural tendency to deformity in many northern races, is but



too apt to give rise to, or aggravate, at least, the deformity we call splay foot; which, when severe, wholly unfits the individual for his duty as a Policeman. The straight, unyielding sole of the boot, as but too often made in London, with no instep, of which foreigners complain, has a tendency to bring the elastic portion of the foot towards the ground, which ought never to happen, and which never does happen, in a well formed foot. This may easily be seen in the impression of the naked foot on firm sand. The natural arch of the foot is at last destroyed by this double pressure exercised on the arch itself—first by the unyielding sole, next by the lowness of the instep. The mischief does not stop here; the boot I now describe impedes, if it does not altogether prevent, the natural flexion of the foot in progression. This flexion takes place in the series of joints which, crossing the foot somewhat diagonally, is formed by the articulations anatomists call metatarso-digital, or, in plain terms, between the base of the first joints of the toes and the metarsal bones supporting them. The result is, the throwing great additional labour on the muscles of the leg, causing pain and distress, especially in the line of the tendo-Achilles, or great extensor tendon of the foot. On such matters I can here only speak generally; the few remarks I have ventured to make are based on the evidence of anatomical structure and physiological observation; for, after all, in the matter of “where the shoe pinches,” all must judge for themselves, applying a remedy as best they can. When we say “that an army is without shoes,” the expression means that it is all but disorganized.

In conclusion: although much must, and always should be, entrusted to the individual himself, with a view to his



acquiring that self-confidence so necessary in all who have active public duties to perform, yet it must ever be useful, nay, highly advantageous, to convince men united in a corps that their wants and comforts are never neglected by those requiring their services. Such a view being acted on gives rise to promptness, activity, energy on their part, and to a respect for themselves and for the corps to which they belong, which in the end never fails to re-act most beneficially on the safety, welfare, and finances of their employers—the Public.

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