

The Blue Dragoon

A Story of Circumstantial Evidence

From the Criminal Records of Holland ¹

In the town of M—, in Holland, there lived, toward the close of the last century, an elderly widow, Madame Andrecht. She inhabited a house of her own, in company with her maid servant, who was nearly of the same age. She was in prosperous circumstances; but, being in delicate health and paralyzed on one side, she had few visitors, and seldom went abroad except to church or to visit the poor. Her chief recreation consisted in paying a visit in spring to her son, who was settled as a surgeon in a village a few miles off. On these occasions, fearing a return of a paralytic attack, she was invariably accompanied by her maid, and, during these visits, her own house was left locked up, but uninhabited and unwatched.

On the 30th June, 17—, the widow returning to M—, from one of these little excursions, found her house had been broken open in her absence, and that several valuable articles, with all her jewels and trinkets, had disappeared. Information was immediately given to the authorities, and a strict investigation of the circumstances took place without delay.

The old lady had been three weeks absent, and the thieves of course had had ample leisure for their attempt. They had evidently gained access through a window in the back part of the house, communicating with the garden, one of the panes of which had been removed, and the bolts of the window forced back, so as to admit of its being pulled up. The bolts of the back door leading into the garden had also been withdrawn, as if the robbers had withdrawn their plunder in that direction. The other doors and windows were uninjured; and several of the rooms appeared to have been unopened. The furniture, generally, was untouched; but the kitchen utensils were left in confusion, as if the robbers had intended removing them, but had been interrupted or pursued.

At the same time it was evident they had gone very deliberately about their work. The ceilings and doors of a heavy old press, the drawers of which had been secured by strong and well constructed locks, had been removed with so much neatness that no part of the woodwork had been injured. The ceiling and doors were left standing by the side of the press. The contents, consisting of jewels, articles of value, and fine linens, were gone. Two strong boxes were found broken open, from which gold and silver coin, with some articles of clothing, had been abstracted. The value of the missing articles amounted to about two thousand Dutch guildens. The house, however, contained many other articles of value, which, singularly enough, had escaped the notice of the thieves. In part color, the greater part of the widow's property consisted of property in the funds, the obligations of which were deposited, not in the press above-mentioned,

¹ The following singular story of circumstantial evidence is compressed from a collection of criminal trials, published at Amsterdam. Notwithstanding the somewhat romantic complexion of the incidents, it has been included as genuine in recent German collections.

but in an iron chest in her sleeping-room. This chest she had accidentally removed, shortly before her departure; placing it in a more retired apartment, where it had fortunately attracted no attention.

The robbery had, apparently, been committed by more than one person; and, it was naturally suspected, by persons well acquainted with the house, and with the circumstances of its inhabitants. The house itself, which was almost the only respectable one in the neighborhood, was situated in a retired street. The neighboring dwellings were inhabited by the poorer classes, and not a few of the less reputable members of society. The inner fosse of the town, which was navigable, flowed along the end of the garden through which the thieves had, apparently, gained admittance, being separated from the garden only by a thin thorn hedge. It was conjectured that the thieves had made their way close to the hedge by means of a boat, and from thence had clambered over into the garden, along the walks and flowerbeds of which foot-marks were traceable.

The discovery of the robbery had created a general sensation, and the house was surrounded by a crowd of curious idlers, whom it required some effort on the part of the police to prevent from intruding into the premises. One of them only, a baker, and the inhabitant of the house opposite to that of the widow, succeeded in making his way in along with the officers of justice. His acquaintances awaited his return with impatience, trusting to be able, from his revelations, to gratify their curiosity at second-hand. If so, they were disappointed, for, on his exit, he assumed an air of mystery, answered equivocally, and observed, that people might suspect many things of which it might not be safe to speak.

In proportion, however, to his taciturnity, was the loquaciousness of a woolspinner, Leender Van N—, the inhabitant of the corner house next to that of the widow. He mingled with the groups who were discussing the subject; dropped hints that he had his own notions as to the culprits, and could, if necessary, give a clue to their discovery. Among the crowd who were observed to listen to these effusions, was a Jew dealer in porcelain, a suspected spy of the police. Before evening, the woolspinner received a summons to the town-house, and was called upon by the Burgomaster for an explanation of the suspicious expressions he had used. He stammered, hesitated, pretended he knew of nothing but general grounds of suspicion, like his neighbors; but being threatened with stronger measures of compulsion, he at last agreed to speak out, protesting, at the same time, that he could willingly have spared persons against whom he had no grudge whatever, and would have been silent forever, if he had foreseen the consequences of his indiscretion.

The substance of his disclosure was to this effect:—Opposite the German post-house, at the head of the street, in which the woolspinner lived, there was a little alehouse. Nicholas D— was the landlord. He was generally known among his acquaintances, not by his baptismal or family name, but by the appellation of the Blue Dragoon, from having formerly served in the horse regiment of Colonel Van Wackerbarth, which was popularly known by the name of the Blues. About two years before, he had become acquainted with and married Hannah, the former servant of Madame Andrecht, who had been six years in that situation, and possessed her entire confidence. Unwilling to part with her attendant, and probably entertaining no favorable notion

of the intended husband, Madame Andrecht had long thrown impediments in the way of the match, so that the parties were obligated to meet chiefly at night, and by stealth. Nicholas found his way into the house at night through the garden of his acquaintance, the woolspinner, and across the hedge which divided it from Madame Andrecht's. Of these nocturnal visits the woolspinner was at first cognizant, but, fearful of getting into a scrape with his respectable neighbor, he was under the necessity of intimating to the bold dragoon, that if he intended to continue his escapades, he must do so from some other quarter than his garden. Nicholas obeyed apparently, and desisted; but, to the surprise of the woolspinner, he found the lovers continued to meet not the less regularly in Madame Andrecht's garden. One evening, however, the mystery was explained. The woolspinner, returning home after dark, saw tied to a post in the canal, close by Madame Andrecht's garden, one of those small boats which were generally used by the dragoons for bringing forage from the magazine; and he at once conjectured that this was the means by which the dragoon was enabled to continue his nocturnal assignations. With the recollection of this passage in the landlord's history was combined the circumstance of recent occurrence, trifling in itself, but which appeared curiously to link in with the mode in which the robbery appeared to have been effected. Ten days before the discovery of the house-breaking, and while the widow was in the country, the woolspinner stated that he found, one morning, a dirty colored handkerchief lying on the grass bank of the fosse, and exactly opposite his neighbor's garden. He took it up and put it in his pocket, without thinking about it at the time. At dinner he happened to remember it, mentioned the circumstance to his wife, showed her the handkerchief, and observed jestingly, "If Madame Andrecht were in town, and Hannah were still in her service, we should say our friend the Blue Dragoon had been making his rounds and had dropt his handkerchief." His wife took the handkerchief, examined it, and exclaimed, "In the name of wonder, what is that you say? Is not Hannah's husband's name Nicholas D—?" pointing out to him at the same time the initials N.D. in the corner. Both, however, had forgotten the circumstance till the occurrence of the robbery naturally recalled it to the husband's mind.

The woolspinner told his story simply; his conclusions appeared unstrained: suspicion became strongly directed against the Blue Dragoon, and these suspicions were corroborated by another circumstance which emerged at the same time.

During the first search of the house, a half-burnt paper, which seemed to have been used for lighting a pipe, was found on the floor, near the press which had been broken open. Neither Madame Andrecht nor her maid smoked; the police officers had no pipes when they entered the house; so the match had in all probability been dropped on the ground by the housebreakers.

On examination of the remains of the paper, it appeared to have been a receipt, such as was usually granted by the excise to innkeepers for payment of the duties on spirits received into the town from a distance, and which served as a permit entitling the holder to put the article into his cellars. The upper part of the receipt, containing the name of the party to whom it was granted was burnt, but the lower part was preserved, containing the signature of the excise officer, and the date of the permit, it was the 16th March of the same year. From these materials it was easy to ascertain what innkeeper in the town had, on that day, received such a permit for spirits. From an examination of the excise register, it appeared that on that day Nicholas D— had received and

paid the duties on several ankers of Geneva. Taken by itself, this would have afforded but slender evidence that he had been the person who had used the paper for a match, and had dropped it within Madame Andrecht's room; but, taken in connection with the finding of the handkerchief, and the suspicious history of his nocturnal rambles which preceded it, it strengthened in a high degree the suspicions against the ex-dragon.

After a short consultation, orders were issued for his apprehension. Surprise, it was thought, would probably extort from him an immediate confession. His wife, his father—a man advanced in years—and his brother, a shoemaker's apprentice, were apprehended at the same time.

A minute search of the house of the innkeeper followed; but none of the stolen articles were at first discovered, and indeed nothing that could excite suspicion, except a larger amount of money than might perhaps have been expected. At last, as the search was on the point of being given up, there was found in one of the drawers a memorandum-book. This was one of the articles mentioned in the list of Madame Andrecht's effects; and, on inspection, there could be no doubt that this was the one referred to—for several pages bore private markings in her own handwriting, and in a side-pocket were found two letters bearing her address. Beyond this, none of the missing articles could be traced in the house.

The persons apprehended were severally examined. Nicholas D— answered every question with the utmost frankness and unconcern. He admitted the truth of the woolspinner's story of his courtship, his nightly scrambles over the hedge, and the subsequent visits to his intended by means of the forage-boat. The handkerchief he admitted to be his property. When and where he had lost it he could not say. It had disappeared about six months before, and he had thought no more about it. When the pocket-book which had been found was laid before him, he gave it back without embarrassment, declared he knew nothing of it, had never had it in his possession, and shook his head with a look of surprise and incredulity when told where it had been found.

The other members of his household appeared equally unembarrassed; they had expressed even greater astonishment than he had done, that the pocket-book, with which they declared themselves entirely unacquainted, should have been found in the place where it was. The young wife burst out into passionate exclamations: she protested it was impossible; or if the book was really found on the spot, that it was inexplicable to her how it came there. The Saturday before (her apprehension having taken place on a Thursday), she had brushed out the press from top to bottom—had cleared out the contents, and nothing of the kind was then to be found there.

The behavior of the married pair and their inmates made, on the whole, a favorable impression on the judge who conducted the inquiry. Their calmness appeared to him the result of innocence; their character was good; their house was orderly and quiet, and none of the articles of value had been discovered in their possession. True, they might have disposed of them elsewhere; but the articles were numerous, and of a kind likely to lead to detection. Why should they have preserved the comparatively worthless article found in the drawer, instead of burning or destroying it? Why, above all, preserve it in a spot so likely to be discovered, if they had so carefully made way with every trace of the rest?

Still unquestionable suspicions rested on the landlord. The thieves must have been well acquainted with Madame Andrecht's house; and this was undeniably his position. His handkerchief, found on the spot about the time of the robbery; the half-burned match dropped on the premises; the pocket-book found in his own house—these, though not amounting to proof, scarcely seemed to admit of an explanation absolutely consistent with innocence.

In this stage of the inquiry, a new witness entered upon the scene. A respectable citizen, a dealer in wood, voluntarily appeared before the authorities and stated that his conscience would no longer allow him to conceal certain circumstances which appeared to bear upon the question, though, from an unwillingness to come forward or to appear as an informer against parties who might be innocent, he had hitherto suppressed any mention of them.

Among his customers was the well-known carpenter, Isaac Van C—, who was generally considerably in arrears with his payments. These arrears increased; the wood-merchant became pressing: at last he threatened judicial proceedings. This brought matters to a point. A few days before the discovery of the robbery at Madame Andrecht's the carpenter made his appearance in his house, and entreated him to delay proceedings, which he said would be his ruin, by bringing all his creditors on his back. "See," said he, "in what manner I am paid myself," putting a basket on the table, which contained a pair of silver candlesticks and a silver coffee-pot. "One of my debtors owes me upwards of sixty guldens. I have tried in vain to get payment, and have been glad to accept of these as the only chance of making anything of the debt. From the silversmiths here I should not get the half of the value for them. I must keep them by me till I go to Amsterdam, where such things are understood; but I shall leave them with you in pledge for my debt." The wood merchant at first declined receiving them, but at length; thinking that it was his only prospect of obtaining ultimate payment, he yielded, and the articles remained on his hands.

A few days afterwards, the robbery became public; the list of the silver articles contained a coffee-pot and candlesticks; and the wood-merchant, not doubting that the articles pledged had formed part of the abstracted effects, had felt himself compelled to make known the way in which they had been obtained, and to place them in the hands of the officers of justice. He meant, he said, to convey no imputation against the carpenter, but it would be easy to learn from his own lips who was the debtor from whom the articles had come.

The court ordered the basket with the plate to be placed, covered, upon the table, and sent forthwith for the carpenter. He arrived in breathless haste, but seemed prepared for what followed, and without waiting for the interrogations of the judge, he proceeded with his explanation.

Pressed by his creditor, the wood-merchant, the carpenter, in his turn, proceeded to press his own debtors. Among them was the Blue Dragoon, Nicholas D—, who was indebted to him in an account of sixty guldens for work done on his premises. Nicholas entreated for delay, but the carpenter being preemptory, he inquired whether he would not take some articles of old silver plate in payment, which, he said, had belonged to his father, and had been left him as a legacy by an old lady in whose family he had been coachman. It was at last agreed that the carpenter should take the plate at a certain value as a partial payment, and it was accordingly brought to his

house the same evening by the dragoon. The latter advised him, in the event of his wishing to dispose of the plate, to take it to Amsterdam, as the silversmiths of the place would not give him half the value for the articles. The carpenter asked him why he had not carried it to Amsterdam himself. "So I would," he answered, "if you had given me time. As it is, give me your promise not to dispose of it here—I have my own reasons for it."

If this statement was correct—and there seemed no reason to doubt the fairness of the carpenter's story—it pressed most heavily against the accused. He was thus found in possession of part of the stolen property, and disposing of it, under the most suspicious circumstances, to a third party.

He was examined anew, and the beginning of his declaration corresponded exactly with the deposition of the carpenter. The latter had worked for him; he was sixty guildens in his debt. He was asked if he had paid the account: he answered he had not been in a condition to do so. He was shown the silver plate, and was told what had been stated by the carpenter. He stammered, became pale, and protested he knew nothing of the plate, and in his statement he persisted in the presence of witnesses. He was then shown the gold which had been found in his house. It belonged, he said, not to himself, but to his father-in-law.

This part of the statement, indeed, was confirmed by the other inmates of his family; but, in other respects, their statements were calculated to increase the suspicions against him. Nicholas, for instance, had stated that no part of his debt to Isaac had been paid—that in fact he had not been in a condition to do so—while the other three members of the household, on the contrary, maintained that a few months before he *had* made a payment of twenty guildens to Isaac, expressly to account of this claim. Nicholas became vastly embarrassed when this contradiction between his own statement and the evidence of the witnesses was pointed out to him. For the first time his composure forsook him—he begged pardon for the falsehood he had uttered. It was true, he said, that he had counted out twenty guildens, in presence of the members of his family, and told them it was intended as a payment to account of Isaac's claim; but the money had not been paid to his creditor. He had been obliged to appropriate it to the payment of some old gambling debts, of which he could not venture to inform his wife.

This departure from the truth on the part of the accused had apparently but slender bearing on the question of the robbery; but it excited a general doubt as to his statements, which further inquiry tended to confirm. The carpenter, anxious to remove any suspicion as to the truth of his own story, produced a sort of account-book kept by himself, in which, under the date of 23d of June, there was the following entry,—“The innkeeper, Nicholas D—, has this day paid me the value of thirty guildens in old silver.” The house-keeper and apprentice of the carpenter also deposed that they had been present on one occasion when the dragoon had proposed that their master should take the silver in payment.

If, on the one hand, the innkeeper had handed over to the carpenter the silver plate, it was plain he was either the thief or the receiver; if he had not done so, the carpenter had not only been guilty of a calumnious accusation, but the suspicion of a guilty connection with the robbery became turned against himself. All presumptions, however, were against the innkeeper. He had admittedly been guilty of a decided falsehood as to the payment,—he could not or would not

give the names of any one of those to whom his gambling debts had been paid, as he alleged—and the fact that he had brought the plate to the carpenter's was attested by three credible witnesses.

The general opinion in the town was decidedly against him. The utmost length that anyone ventured to go, was, to suggest that his relations, who had been apprehended with him, might be innocent of any participation in his guilt; though, being naturally anxious to save him, they might somewhat have compromised the truth by their silence, or their statements.

The dragoon was removed from his provisional custody to the prison of the town; the others were subjected to a close surveillance, that all communication between them might be prevented. As all of them, however, persisted in the story, exactly as it had at first been told, stronger measures were at length resorted to. On the motion of the Burgomaster, as public prosecutor, “that the principal party accused, Nicholas D—, should be delivered over to undergo the usual preparatory process for compelling confession,” namely, the torture, the court, after consideration of the state of the evidence, unanimously issued the usual warrant against him to that effect. Some pitied him, though none doubted his guilt. The general impression in the town was, that the courage of the innkeeper would soon give way, and that in fact, he would probably confess the whole upon the first application of the torture.

The preparations were complete—the torture was to take place the next day, when the following letter, bearing the postmark of Rotterdam, was received by the court:

“Before I leave the country, and betake myself where I shall be beyond the reach either of the court of M—, or the military tribunal of the garrison, I would save the poor unfortunate persons who are now prisoners at M—. Beware of punishing the innkeeper, his wife, his father, and brother, for a crime of which they are not guilty. How the story of the carpenter is connected with theirs, I cannot conjecture. I have heard of it with the greatest surprise. The latter may not himself be entirely innocent. Let the judge pay attention to this remark. You may spare yourselves the trouble of inquiring after me. If the wind is favorable, by the time you read this letter I shall be on my passage to England.

JOSEPH CHRISTIAN RUHLER,

Former Corporal in the Company of Le Lery

The court gladly availed themselves of the opportunity afforded by the letter to put off the torture. At first sight it did not appear a mere device to obtain delay. A company under Captain Le Lery was in garrison in the town; in that company there was a corporal of the name of Ruhler, who some weeks before had deserted and disappeared from his quarters. All inquiries after him since had proved in vain. The court subsequently learned from the report of the officer in command, that he had disappeared the evening before the day when the news of the robbery became public. He had been last seen by the guard in the course of the forenoon before his disappearance. Some connection between the events appeared extremely probable.

But a new discovery seemed suddenly to demolish the conclusions founded on the letter. It had been laid before the commanding officer, who at once declared the handwriting was

counterfeited; it was not that of Ruhler, which was well known, nor had it the least resemblance to it. The evidence of several of his comrades, and a comparison of the handwriting with some regimental lists, undoubtedly in the handwriting of Ruhler, proved this beyond a doubt.

The letter from Rotterdam thus was merely the device of some unknown friend or confederate, and probably resorted to only to put off the punishment of the accused. How, indeed, if Ruhler was really implicated in the robbery, should he have thus cast suspicion upon himself? If his object had been merely to preserve the innkeeper and his friends from the torture, he would have assumed some other name. In all probability, therefore, some third party, implicated in the robbery, had availed himself of the accidental disappearance of the corporal to throw the suspicion of the robbery upon him, and to exculpate the guilty parties, who, if brought to the torture, might be induced to disclose the names of all their associates. To prevent this was probably the object of the letter. This, at least, was the prevailing opinion.

The strongest efforts were now made to discover the true writer of the letter; and meantime the torture was put off, when two other important witnesses made their appearance on the stage. Neither had the least connection with the other; nay, the circumstances which they narrated appeared in some respects contradictory, and while they threw light on the subject in one quarter, they only served to darken it in another.

TO BE CONCLUDED

From the *Atlas* of Dec 21, 1849
Concluded from the Atlas of Dec. 18

A merchant in the town, who dealt in different wares, and lived in the neighborhood of Madame Andrecht's house, had been absent on a journey of business during the discovery of the robbery, and the course of the subsequent judicial proceedings. Scarcely had he returned and heard the story of the robbery, when he voluntarily presented himself next morning before the authorities, for the purpose, as he said, of making important revelations which might have the effect of averting destruction from the innocent. In the public coach he had already heard some particulars of the case, and had formed his own conjectures; but since his return, these conjectures had with him grown into convictions, and he had not closed an eye from the apprehension that his disclosures might come too late. Had he returned sooner, matters would never have reached this length.

At the time when the robbery must have taken place, he had been in the town. The carpenter, Isaac Van C—, called upon him one day, begging the loan of the boat, which he was in the custom of using for the transport of bales and heavy packages to different quarters of the town. The boat generally lay behind the merchant's house, close to his warehouse, which was situated on the bank of the town fosse already alluded to. Isaac assured him he would require the boat only for a night or two, and would take care that it was returned in the morning in good condition. To the question why he wanted the boat at night, he, after some hesitation, returned for answer, that he had engaged to transport the furniture of some people who were removing, and who had their own reasons for not doing so in daylight, implying that they were taking French leave of their creditors. "And you propose to lend yourself to such a transaction?" said

the merchant, peremptorily refusing the loan of the boat. The carpenter interrupted him; assured him he had only jested; that his real object was only to amuse himself in fishing with some of his comrades; and that he had only not stated that at first, as the merchant might be apprehensive that the operation might dirty his boat. The merchant at last yielded to the continued requests of the carpenter, and agreed to lend him the boat, but upon express condition that it should be returned to its place in the morning. In this respect the carpenter kept his word; when the merchant went to his warehouse in the morning, he saw the carpenter and his apprentice engaged in fastening the boat. They went away without observing him. It struck him, however, as singular, that they appeared to have with them neither nets nor fishing tackle of any kind. He examined the boat, and was surprised to find it perfectly clean and dry, whereas, if used for fishing, it would probably have been found half filled with water, and dirty enough. In this particular, then, the carpenter had been detected in an untruth. The boat had not been fastened to its usual place; the merchant jumped into it for that purpose, and from a crevice in the side he saw something protruding; he took it out; it was a couple of silver forks wrapped in paper. Thus the carpenter's first version of the story—as to the purpose for which he wanted the boat—was the true one after all. He *had* been assisting some bankrupt to carry off his effects. Angry at having been thus deceived, the merchant put the forks in his pocket, and set out forthwith on his way to Isaac's. The carpenter, his apprentice, and his housekeeper, were in the workshop. He produced the forks. "These," said he, "are what you have left in my boat. Did you use these to eat your fish with?"

The three were visibly embarrassed. They cast stolen glances upon one another; no one ventured to speak. The housekeeper first recovered her composure. She stammered out,—“that he must think ill of them; that her master had only been assisting some people who were leaving the town quietly, to remove their furniture and effects.” As the transaction was unquestionably not of the most credible character, this might account for the visible embarrassment they betrayed; when he demanded, however, the names of the parties whose effects they had been removing, no answer was forthcoming. The carpenter at last told him he was not at liberty to disclose them then, but that he should learn them afterwards. All three presently entreated him to be silent as to this matter. He was so; but in the meantime made inquiry quietly as to who had left the town, though without success. Shortly after his journey took place, and the transaction had worn out of mind, till recalled to his recollection on his return, when he was made aware of the whole history of the robbery; and forthwith came to the conclusion, that the relay at the bottom of the matter some shameful plot to implicate the innocent, and to shield those he believed to be the true criminals, namely, Isaac Van C—, his apprentice, and housekeeper, the leading witnesses, in fact, against the unfortunate dragoon.

The criminal proceedings, in consequence of these disclosures, took a completely different turn. The merchant was a witness entirely above suspicion. True, there was here only the testimony of one witness, either to the innocence of the dragoon, or the guilt of the carpenter; but the moral conviction to which his statement gave rise in the mind of the judge was so strong, that he did not hesitate to issue an immediate order for the arrest of the carpenter and his companions, before publicity should be given to the merchant's disclosures. No sooner were they apprehended, than a strict scrutiny was made in the carpenter's house.

This measure was attended with the most complete success. With the exception of a few trifles, the whole of the effects which had been abstracted from Madame Andrecht's, were found in the house. The examination of the prisoners produced a very different result from those of Nicholas and his comrades. True, they denied the charges, but they did so with palpable confusion, and their statements abounded in the grossest contradictions of each other, and even of themselves. They came to recriminations and mutual accusations; and, being threatened with the torture, they at last offered to make a full confession. The substance of their admissions was as follows:—

Isaac Van C—, his apprentice, and his housekeeper, were the real perpetrators of the robbery at Madame Andrecht's. Who had first suggested to them the design does not appear from the evidence. But with the old lady's house and its arrangements they were as fully acquainted as the dragoon. The apprentice, when formerly in the service of another master, had wrought in it, and knew every corner of it thoroughly. They had borrowed the boat for the purpose of getting access across the canal into the garden, and used it for carrying off the stolen property, as already mentioned. On the morning when the robbery became public, the master and the apprentice had mingled with the crowd to learn what reports were in circulation on the subject. Among other things the apprentice had heard that the woolspinner's wife unhesitatingly expressed her suspicions against the Blue Dragoon. Of this he informed his comrades, and they, delighted at finding so convenient a scapegoat for averting danger from themselves, forthwith formed the infernal design of directing, by every means in their power, the suspicions against the innkeeper.

The apprentice entered the drinking-room of the inn-keeper, and called for some schnapps, at the same time asking for a coal to light his pipe. While the innkeeper went out to fetch the coal, the apprentice took the opportunity of slipping the widow's memorandum-book, which he had brought in his pocket, betwixt the drawers. He succeeded, and the consequences followed as the culprits had foreseen: the house was searched, the book found, and, in the eyes of many, the dragoon's guilt established.

If these confessions were to be trusted, the dragoon and his family seemed exculpated from any actual participation in the robbery. Still, there were circumstances which these confessions did not clear up; some grave points of doubt remain unexplained. That the carpenter had himself pledged the silver-plate with the wood-merchant, without having received it from Nicholas, was now likely enough; he had accused him, probably, only to screen himself. But how came Nicholas's handkerchief to be found at the side of the hedge? How came the excise receipt, which belonged to him, to be used as a match by the thieves? The carpenter and his comrades declared that as to these facts they knew nothing; and as they now had no inducement to conceal the truth, there could be no reasonable doubt that their statement might, in these particulars, be depended upon.

The suspicion again arose that other accomplices must be concerned in the affair; and the subject of the letter from the corporal who had deserted, became anew the subject of attention. If not written by himself, it might have been written by another at his suggestion, and in one way or other he might have a connection with the mysterious subject of the robbery.

While the proceedings against the carpenter and his associates were in progress, an incident had occurred, which could not fail to awaken curiosity and attention with regard to this letter. The schoolmaster of a village about a league from the town presented himself before the authorities, exhibited a scrap of paper on which nothing appeared but the name Joseph Christian Ruhler, and inquired whether, shortly before, a letter in this handwriting and subscribed with this name, had not been transmitted to the court? On comparing the handwriting of the letter with the paper exhibited by the schoolmaster, it was unquestionable that both were the production of the same hand.

The statement of the schoolmaster was this:

In the village where he resided, there was a deaf and dumb young man, named Henry Hechting, who had been sent by the parish to the schoolmaster for board and education. He had succeeded in imparting to the unfortunate youth the art of writing; so perfectly, indeed, that he could communicate with anyone by means of a slate and slate-pencil which he always carried about with him. He also wrote so fair a hand, that he was employed by many persons, and even sometimes by the authorities, to transcribe or copy writings for them. Some time before, an unknown person had appeared in the village, had inquired after the deaf and dumb young man in the schoolmaster's absence, and had taken him with him to the alehouse to write out something for him. The unknown had called for a private room, ordered a bottle of wine, and, by means of the slate, gave him to understand that he wanted him to make a clean copy of a draft of a letter which he produced. Hechting did so at once without suspicion. Still, the contents of the letter appeared to him of a peculiar and questionable kind, and the whole demeanor of the stranger evinced restlessness and anxiety. When he came, however, to add the address of the letter, "To Herr Van der R—, Burgomaster of M—," he hesitated to do so, and yielded only to the pressing entreaties of the stranger, who paid him a gulden for his trouble, requesting him to preserve strict silence as to the whole affair.

The deaf and dumb young man, when he began to reflect upon the matter, felt more and more convinced that he had unconsciously been made a party to some illegal transaction. He at last confessed the whole to his instructor, who at once perceived that there existed a close connection between the incident which had occurred and the criminal procedure in the noted case of the robbery. The letter of the corporal had already got into circulation in the neighborhood, and was plainly the one which his pupil had been employed to copy. The school-master, at his own hand, set on foot a small preliminary inquiry. He hastened to the innkeeper of the village inn, and asked him if he could recollect the stranger who some days before had ordered a private room and a bottle of wine, and who had been for some time shut up with the deaf and dumb lad. The host remembered the circumstance, but did not know the man. His wife, however, recollected that she had seen him talking on terms of cordial familiarity with the corn miller, Overblink, as he was resting at the inn with his carts. The schoolmaster repaired on the spot to Overblink, inquired who was the man with whom he had conversed and shaken hands some days before at the inn, and the miller, without much hesitation, answered that he remembered the day, the circumstance, and the man, very well, and that the later was his old acquaintance the baker, H—, from the town. The schoolmaster hastened to lay these particulars before the authorities.

How, then, was the well-known baker, H—, implicated in this affair, which seemed gradually to be expanding itself so strangely? The facts as to the robbery itself seemed exhausted by the confessions of the carpenter and his associates. They alone had broken into the house—they alone had carried off and appropriated the stolen articles. And yet, if the baker was entirely unconnected with the matter, what could be his motive for mixing himself up with the transaction, and writing letters, as if to avert suspicion from those who had been first accused? Was his motive simply compassion? Was he aware of the real circumstances of the crime, and its true perpetrators? Did he know that the Blue Dragoon was innocent? But if so, why employ this mysterious and circuitous mode of assisting him? Why resort to this anxious precaution of employing a deaf and dumb lad as his amanuensis? Why such signs of restlessness and apprehension,—such anxious injunctions of silence? Plainly the baker was not entirely innocent: this was the conviction left on the minds of the judges, for it was now recollected that this baker was the same person who, on the morning when the robbery was detected, had contrived to make his way into the house along with the officers of justice. It was he who had lifted from the ground the match containing the half-burnt receipt, and handed it to the officers present. His excessive zeal had even attracted attention before. He had, the, broken into the house independently of the carpenter. Had he, too, committed a robbery—and was he agitated by the fear of its detection? But all the stolen articles had been recovered, and all of them had been found with the carpenter. The mystery, for the moment, seemed only increased; but it was about to be cleared up in a way wonderful enough, but entirely satisfactory.

While the schoolmaster and miller Overblink were detained at the Council-Chamber, the baker H— was taken into custody. A long and circumstantial confession was the result, to the particulars of which we shall immediately advert. From his disclosures, a warrant was also issued for the apprehension of the woolspinner, Leender Van N— and his wife—the same who had first circulated the reports and suspicions against the dragoon, and who had afterwards given such plausible, and, as it appeared, such frank and sincere information against him before the court. Both had taken the opportunity of making off; but the pursuit of justice was successful—before evening they were brought back and committed to prison.

The criminal procedure now proceeded rapidly to a close, but it related to a quite different matter from the robbery. This third association of culprits, it appeared, had as little to do with the carpenter and his comrades as these had with the dragoon and his inmates. But for the housebreaking, in which the persons last arrested had no share, the real crime in which they were concerned would, in all human probability, never have seen the light.

The following disclosures were the result of the confessions of the guilty, and of the other witnesses who were examined.

On the evening of the 29th June, there were assembled in the low and dirty chamber of the woolspinner, Leendert Van N—, a party of card players. It has already been mentioned that this quarter of the town was in a great measure inhabited by the disreputable portion of the public—only a few houses, like those of Madame Andrecht, being occupied by the better classes. The gamblers were the Corporal Ruhler, of the company of Le Lery, then lying in garrison in the place, the master baker H—, and the host himself, Leendert Van N—. The party were old

acquaintances; they hated and despised each other, but a community of interests and pursuits drew them together.

The baker and the corporal had long been acquainted, the former baked the bread for the garrison company, the latter had the charge of receiving it from him. The corporal had soon detected various frauds committed by the baker, and gave the baker the choice of denouncing them to the commanding officer, or sharing with him the profits of the fraud. The baker naturally chose the latter, but hated the corporal as much as he feared him; while the latter made him continually feel how completely he considered him in his power.

A still deadlier enmity existed between the corporal and the woolspinner and his wife. The latter had formerly supplied the garrison with gaiters and other articles of clothing, and he had reason to believe that the corporal had been the means of depriving him of this commission, by which he had suffered materially. But the corporal had still a good deal in his power; he might be the means of procuring other orders, and it was necessary, therefore, to suppress any appearance of irritation, and even to appear to court his favor,

Such an association as that which subsisted among these comrades, where each hates and suspects the other, and noting but the tie of a common interest unites them, can never be of long duration. The moment is sure to arrive when the spark falls upon the mine which has been so long prepared, and the explosion takes place, the more fearful the longer it has been delayed.

These worthy associates were playing cards on the evening above mentioned they quarreled; and the quarrel became more and more embittered. The long-suppressed hatred on the part of the baker and the woolspinner burst forth. The corporal retorted in terms equally offensive; he applied to them the epithets which they deserved. From words they proceeded to blows, and deadly weapons were laid hold of on both sides. But two male foes and a female fury, arrayed on one side, were too much even for a soldier. The corporal, seized and pinioned from behind by the woman, fell under the blows of the woolspinner. As yet the baker had rather hounded on the others than actually interfered in the scuffle; but when the corporal, stretched on the ground, and his head bleeding from a blow on the corner of the table, which he had received in falling, began to utter loud curses against them, and to threaten them all with public exposure—particularly that deceitful scoundrel the baker—the latter, prompted either by fear or hatred, whispered to the woolspinner and his wife that now was the time to make an end of him at once; and that if they did not, they were ruined.

The deadly counsel was adopted: they fell upon the corporal: with a few blows life was extinct; the corpse, swimming in blood, lay at their feet. The deed was irrevocable; all three had shared in it; all were alike guilty, and had the same reason to tremble at the terrors of the law. With the body still warm at their feet, they entered into a solemn mutual engagement to be true to each other; to preserve inviolable secrecy as to the crime; and to extinguish, so far as in them lay, every trace of its commission.

On the night of the murder, they had devised no plan for washing out the blood, and removing the body, which of course required to be disposed of, so that disappearance of Ruhler might cause no suspicion. The terrors of conscience, and the apprehension of the consequences of their

crime, had too completely occupied their minds for the moment. The next morning, however, they met again at the woolspinner's house to arrange their plans. Suddenly a noise was heard in the street,—it was the commotion caused by the news of the discovery of the robbery at Madame Andrecht's. The culprits stood pale and confounded. What was more probable than that an immediate search in pursuit of the robbers, or of the stolen articles, would take place into every house of this suspected and disreputable quarter. The woolspinner's house was the next to that which had been robbed; the flooring was at that moment wet with blood; the body of the murdered corporal lay in the cellar. Immediate measures must be resorted to, to stop the apprehended search, till time could be found for removing the body.

The object, then, was to give to the authorities such hints as should induce them to pass over the houses of the baker and the woolspinner. The woolspinner's wife had the merit of devising the infernal project which occurred to them. The Blue Dragoon was to be the victim. A robbery had taken place. Why might he not have been the criminal? He had often scaled the hedge—had often entered the house at night during his courtship. But then a corroborating circumstance might be required to ground the suspicion. It was supplied by the possession of a handkerchief which he had accidentally dropt in her house, and which she had not thought it necessary to restore to him. It might be placed in any spot they thought fit, and the first links in the chain of suspicion were clear.

The invention of the baker came to the aid of the woolspinner's wife. One token was not enough; a second proof of the presence of the dragoon in Madame Andrecht's house must be devised. The baker had, one day, been concluding a bargain with a peasant before the house of the dragoon. He required a bit of paper to make some calculation, and asked the host for some, who handed him an old excise permit, telling him to make his calculations on the back. The scrap of paper the baker had still in his pocket-book. This would undoubtedly compromise the dragoon. But then it bore the name and handwriting of the baker on the back. This portion of it was accordingly burnt; the date and signature of the excise officer were enough for the diabolical purpose it was intended to effect. It was rolled up into a match, and deposited by the baker (who, as already said, had contrived to make his way along with the police into the house) upon the floor, where he pretended to find it, and delivered it to the authorities.

The machinations of these wretches were unconsciously assisted by those of the carpenter and his confederates. The suspicion which the handkerchief and the match had originated, the finding of the pocket-book within the house of the dragoon appeared to confirm and complete;—an accidental concurrence of two independent plots, both resorted to from the principle of self-preservation, and having in view the same infernal object.

But this object, so far as concerned the baker and the woolspinner, had been too effectually attained. They had wished to excite suspicion against Nicholas, only with the view of gaining time to remove the corpse, and efface the traces of the murder. This had been effected—their intrigue had served its purpose; and they could not but feel some remorse at the idea that an innocent person should be thereby brought to ruin. The strange intervention of chance—the finding of the pocket-book, the accusation by the carpenter, filled them with a secret terror; they trembled: their consciences again awoke. The thought of the torture, which awaited the

unfortunate innkeeper, struck them with horror. It was not the ordinary fear of guilty men, afraid of the disclosures of an accomplice—for the dragoon knew nothing, he could say nothing to compromise them,—it was a feeling implanted by a Divine power, which seemed irresistibly to impel them to use their endeavors to avert his fate.

They met, they consulted as to their plans. A scheme occurred to them which promised to serve a double purpose,—by which delay might be obtained for Nicholas, while at the same time it might be the means of permanently ensuring their own safety. To resuscitate the murdered Corporal Ruhler in another quarter, and to charge him with the guilt of the robbery, might serve both ends. It gave a chance of escape to Nicholas: it accounted for the disappearance of the corporal. Hence the letter which represented him as alive, as the perpetrator of the robbery, and as a deserter flying to another country; which they thought would very naturally put a stop to all further inquiry after him.

But their plan was too finely spun, and the very precautions to which they had resorted, led, as sometimes happens, to discovery. If they had been satisfied to allow the proposed letter to be copied out by the woolspinner's wife, as she offered, to be taken by her to Rotterdam, and put into the post, suspicion could hardly have been awakened against them; the handwriting of the woman, who had seldom occasion to use the open, would have been unknown to the burgomaster or the court. The deaf and dumb youth, to whom they resorted as their copyist, betrayed them; step by step they were traced out,—and, between fear and hope, a full confession was at last extorted from them.

Sentence of death was pronounced against the parties who had been concerned in the housebreaking as well as in the murder, and carried into effect against all of them, with the exception of the woolspinner's wife, who died during her imprisonment. The woolspinner alone exhibited any signs of penitence.

The Boston Daily Atlas, December 18 & 21, 1849