

A Suspected California Murderer

Arrested—Charged With Killing Four Men: A German, For his Money, and Two Sheriffs and a Driver, Who Were Conveying Him To Prison

THE following article is taken from the New York Dispatch (1861), and serves to illustrate the sagacity of Officer McWatters in “picking out his man” in a crowd.

A young man named Velge, lately from California, was arrested at the pier of the Ocean Mail Steamship Company by Officers McWatters and Hartz, of the Steamboat Squad, and taken to Police Headquarters, where he has been since detained, till the matter can undergo examination before a magistrate. The report, as obtained from an officer at the central office, is substantially as follows: —

About eighteen months since, a German, residing in Sacramento, was murdered under circumstances of extraordinary brutality. He was mild and inoffensive, said no extenuation appeared to exist for the atrocious crime. He had saved some money, which the assassin had taken, but the amount was hardly sufficient to induce an ordinary bravo to attempt his life, or otherwise disturb him.

The suspected murderer was known to the police. Extraordinary measures were adopted to bring him to justice. His likeness was obtained somehow, and photographs of it were multiplied and distributed all over California and Oregon.

After some time, intelligence was received at Sacramento that the suspected murderer was at Carson City. There was a resemblance, certainly. The sheriff of Sacramento and a deputy repaired thither, and arrested him. A conveyance was obtained, and the legal formularies having all - been attended to, the officers set out for Sacramento.

The journey was tedious, as may well be expected. The party finally neared Sacramento. Already the officers began to dream of home and rest from their fatiguing journey. The driver was in an equally listless mood. Velge, the prisoner, was not slow to perceive their half- somnolent condition, and take advantage of the circumstances.

Quietly but adroitly taking hold of the revolver which one of the officers was carrying in one pocket, he cocked it so as not to arouse attention, and a moment after sent a bullet through the brain of the unfortunate sheriff. The other sprang to his feet, just in time to receive the contents of another barrel in his body. He fell from the vehicle, while the assassin hastened to despatch the driver. Having thoroughly completed the work of death he fled.

The excitement produced by this triple murder was terrible. Rewards were offered, and the State was thoroughly searched for the felon. But it was of no avail.

Among the passengers on the North Star was a young man of singular mien, whose appearance attracted comment. One of the passengers had a portrait of the murderer of

the sheriffs, and found it to agree remarkably with that of the strange passenger. He made no effort to call attention to the matter, but took the opportunity, as soon as he came on shore, to place the authorities in possession of the facts. The first man whom he observed was the busy McWatters, of the Steamboat Squad, who was making himself ubiquitous and useful in the way of superintending the landing of baggage, protecting passengers from runners and pickpockets, and enabling them to come and go as best suited their convenience.

Approaching the indomitable McWatters, Rev. Mr. Peck addressed him.

Peck. — “Are you an officer?”

McWatters. — “Yes, sir: I hold that position, and am proud of it.”

Peck. — “I have an important matter to call your attention to. Please examine this likeness.”

McWatters. — “I see it. I would know that face in a thousand. I could pick it out in a crowd.”

Peck. — “He is a passenger on the North Star, and I think is guilty of murder.”

Calling his comrade to his help, McWatters carefully noted each passenger as he was leaving the steamer. As Velge came up, Mac recognized and arrested him. He was thunderstruck at the occurrence, and protested his innocence. The officers conveyed him to the central office, and laid the case before the superintendent. The prisoner showed that he was an old resident of this city, though only twenty years old. Several of his relatives were at headquarters yesterday pleading his innocence. The clergyman who had caused his arrest made his statement to the superintendent, who finally decided to retain the young man in custody till he could be brought before a magistrate.

There was certainly a striking resemblance between the portrait and the countenance of the prisoner. If the suspicions now entertained should prove to be well founded, this is another instance of the perpetration of crime followed by its speedy detection.

McWatters, George. *Knots Untied: Or, Ways and By-Ways in the Hidden Life of American Detectives*. Hartford: Burr and Hyde, 1871. (848 pages)