

From *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*

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Recollections of a Police-Officer  
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*The Robber's Revenge*

by William Russell

Levasseur and his confederates sailed for the penal settlement in the ill-fated convict ship, the *Amphytrion*, the total wreck of which on the coast of France, and the consequent drowning of the crew and prisoners, excited so painful a sensation in England. A feeling of regret for the untimely fate of Le Breton, whom I regarded rather as a weak dupe than a purposed rascal, passed over my mind as I read the announcement in the newspapers; but newer events had almost jostled the incidents connected with his name from my remembrance, when a terrible adventure vividly recalled them, and taught me how fierce and untamable are the instincts of hate and revenge in a certain class of minds.

A robbery of plate had been committed in Portman Square, with an ingenuity and boldness which left no doubt that it had been effected by clever and practiced hands. The detective officers first employed having failed to discover the offenders, the threads of the imperfect and broken clew were placed in my hands, to see if my somewhat renowned dexterity, or luck, as many of my brother officers preferred calling it, would enable me to piece them out to a satisfactory conclusion. By the description obtained of a man who had been seen lurking about the house a few days previous to the burglary, it had been concluded by one of my predecessors in the investigation that one Martin, a fellow with half-a-dozen *aliases*, and a well-known traveler on the road to the hulks, was concerned in the affair; and by their advice a reward of fifty pounds had been offered for his apprehension and conviction. I prosecuted the inquiry in my usual watchfulness, without alighting upon any new fact or intimation of importance. I could not discover that a single article of the missing property had been either pawned or offered for sale, and little doubt remained that the crucible had fatally diminished the chances of detection. The only hope was, that an increased reward might induce one of the gangs to betray his confederates; and as the property was of large value, this was done, and one hundred guineas was promised for the required information. I had been to the printers to order the placards announcing the increased recompense—and after indulging in a long gossip with the foreman of the establishment, whom I knew well, was passing at about a quarter past ten o'clock through Ryder's Court, Newport Market, where a tall man met and passed me swiftly, holding a handkerchief to this face. There was nothing remarkable in that, as the weather was bitter cold and sleety; and I walked unheedingly on. I was just in the act of passing out of the court towards Leicester Square, when swift steps sounded suddenly behind me. I instinctively turned; and as I did so, received a violent blow on the left shoulder—intended, I doubted not, for the nape of my neck—from the tall individual who had passed me a minute previously. As he still held the handkerchief to his face, I did not catch even a momentary glance at his features, and he ran off with surprising speed. The blow, sudden, jarring, and inflicted with a sharp instrument—by a strong knife or a dagger—caused a sensation of faintness; and before I recovered from it all chance of successful pursuit was at an end. The wound, which was not at all serious, I had dressed

at a chemist's shop in the Haymarket; and as proclaiming the attack would do nothing towards detecting the perpetrator of it, I said little about it to anyone, and managed to conceal it entirely from my wife, to whom it would have suggested a thousand painful apprehensions whenever I happened to be unexpectedly detained from home. The brief glimpse I had of the balked assassin afforded no reasonable indication of his identity. To be sure he ran at an amazing and unusual pace, but this was a qualification possessed by so many of the light-legged as well as the light-fingered gentry of my professional acquaintance, that it could not justify even a random suspicion; and I determined to forget the unpleasant incident as soon as possible.

The third evening after this occurrence I was again passing along Leicester Square at a somewhat late hour, but this time with all my eyes about me. Snow, which the wind blew sharply in one's face, was falling fast, and the cold was intense. Except myself, and a tallish, snow-wreathed figure—a woman apparently—not a living soul was to be seen. This figure which was standing still at the further side of the square, appeared to be awaiting me, and as I drew near it, threw back the hood of a cloak, and to my great surprise disclosed the features of Madame Jaubert. This lady, some years before, had carried on, not very far from the spot where she now stood, a respectable millinery business. She was a widow with one child, a daughter of about seven years of age. Marie-Louise, as she was named, was one unfortunate day sent to Coventry Street on an errand with some money in her hand, and never returned. The inquiries set on foot proved utterly without effect; not the slightest intelligence of the fate of the child was obtained—and the grief and distraction of the bereaved mother resulted in temporary insanity. She was confined in a lunatic asylum for seven or eight months, and when pronounced convalescent, found herself homeless, and almost penniless, in the world. This sad story I heard from one of the keepers of the asylum during her sojourn there. It was a subject she herself never, I was aware, touched upon; and she had no reason to suspect that I was in the slightest degree informed of this melancholy passage in her life. She, why, I know not, changed her name from that of Duquesne to the one she now bore—Jaubert; and for the last two or three years had supported a precarious existence by plausible begging letters addressed to persons of credulous benevolence; for which offence she had frequently visited the police courts at the insistence of the secretary of the Mendacity Society, and it was there that I consequently made her acquaintance.

“Madame Jaubert!” I exclaimed with unfeigned surprise. “Why, what on earth can you be waiting here for on such a night as this?”

“To see you!” was her curt reply.

“To see me! Depend upon it, then you are knocking at the wrong door for not the first time in your life. The very little faith I ever had in professional widows, with twelve small children, all down in the measles, has long since vanished, and—”

“Nay,” she interrupted—she spoke English, by the way, like a native—“I'm not such a fool as to be trying the whimpering dodge upon you. It is a matter of business. You want to find Jem Martin?”

“Ay, truly; but what can *you* know of him? Surely you are not *yet* fallen so low as to be the associate or accomplice of burglars?”

“Neither, yet, nor likely to be so,” replied the woman. “Still I could tell you where to place your hand on James Martin, if I were but sure of the reward.”

“There can be no doubt about that,” I answered.

“Then follow me, and before ten minutes are past you will have secured your man.”

I did so—cautiously, suspiciously; for my adventure three evenings before had rendered me unusually circumspect and watchful. She led the way to the most crowded quarter of St. Giles’s, and when she had reached the entrance of a dark, blind alley, called Hine’s Court, turned into it, and beckoned me to follow.

“Nay, nay, Madame Jaubert,” I exclaimed, “that won’t do. You mean fairly, I dare say; but I don’t enter that respectable alley alone at this time of night.”

She stopped silent and much embarrassed. Presently she said, with a sneer, “You are afraid, I suppose?”

“Yes, I am.”

“What is to be done, then?” she added, after a few moments consideration. “He is alone, I assure you.”

“That is possible; still I do not enter that *cul-se-sac* tonight unaccompanied save by you.”

“You suspect me of some evil design, Mr. Waters?” said the woman with an accent of reproach. “I thought you might, and yet nothing can be further from the truth. My sole object is to obtain the reward, and escape of this life of misery and degradation, to my own country, and if possible begin the world respectably again. Why should you doubt me?”

“How came you acquainted with this robber’s haunts?”

“The explanation is easy, but this is not the proper time for it. Stay—can’t you get assistance?”

“Easily—in less than ten minutes; and if you are here when I return, and your information proves correct, I will ask pardon for my suspicions.”

“Be it so,” she said joyfully; “and be quick, for this weather is terrible.”

Ten minutes had not passed when I returned with half-a-dozen officers, and found Madame Jaubert still at her post. We followed her up the court, caught Martin, sure enough asleep upon a wretched pallet of straw in one of the alley hovels, and walked him off, terribly scared and surprised, to the nearest station house, where he passed the remainder of the night.

The next day Martin proved an *alibi* of the distinctest, most undeniable kind. He had been an inmate of the Clerkenwell prison for the last three months, with the exception of just six days previous to our capture of him; and he was of course, at once discharged. The reward was payable only on the conviction of the offender, and the disappointment of poor Madame Jaubert was extreme. She wept bitterly at the thought of being compelled to continue her present disreputable mode of life, when a thousand francs—the sum she believed Martin's capture would have assured her—besides sufficient for her traveling expenses and decent outfit, would, she said, purchase a partnership in a small but respectable millinery shop in Paris. "Well," I remarked to her, "there is no reason to despair. You have not only proved your sincerity and good faith, but that you possess a knowledge—how acquainted you best know—of the haunts and hiding places of burglars. The reward, as you may have seen by the placards, has been doubled; and I have a strong opinion, from something that has reached me this morning, that if you could light upon one Armstrong, *alias* Rowden, it would be as certainly yours as if already in your pocket."

"Armstrong—Rowden!" repeated the woman with anxious simplicity; "I never heard of either of these names. What sort of person is he?"

I described him minutely; but Madame Jaubert appeared to entertain little or no hope of discovering his whereabouts, and ultimately went away in a very disconsolate mood, after, however, arranging to meet me the next evening.

I met her as agreed. She could obtain, she said, no intelligence of any reliable worth; and pressed me for further particulars. Was Armstrong a drinking, a gaming, or a play-going man? I told her all I knew of his habits, and a gleam of hope glanced across her face as one or two indications were mentioned. I was to see her again on the morrow. It came; she was as far off as ever; and I advised her to waste no further time in the pursuit, but to at once endeavor to regain a position of respectability by the exercise of industry in the trade or business in which she was reputedly well skilled. Madame Jaubert laughed scornfully; and a gleam, it seemed to me, of her never entirely subdued insanity shot out from her deep-set, flashing eyes. It was finally settled, that I should meet her once more, at the same place, at about eight o'clock the next evening.

I arrived somewhat late at the appointed rendezvous, and found Madame Jaubert in a state of manifest excitement and impatience. She had, she was pretty sure, discovered Armstrong, and knew that he was at that moment in a house in Greek Street, Soho.

"Greek Street, Soho! Is he alone?"

“Yes; with the exception of a woman who is minding the premises, and of whom he is an acquaintance under another name. You will be able to secure him without the least risk or difficulty, but not an instant must be lost.”

Madame Jaubert perceived my half-hesitation. “Surely,” she exclaimed, “you are not afraid of one man! It’s useless affecting to suspect *me*, after what has occurred.”

“True,” I replied. “Lead on.”

The house at which we stopped in Greek Street, appeared to be an empty one, from the printed bills in the window announcing it to be let or sold. Madame Jaubert knocked in a peculiar manner at the door, which was presently opened by a woman. “Is Mr. Brown still within?” Madame Jaubert asked in a low voice.

“Yes, what do you want with him?”

“I have brought a gentleman who will most likely be a purchaser of some of the goods he has to dispose of.”

“Walk in then, if you please,” was the answer. We did so; and found ourselves, as the door closed, in pitch darkness. “This way,” said the woman. “You shall have a light in half a minute.”

“Let me guide you,” said Madame Jaubert, as I groped onward by the wall, and the same time seizing my right hand. Instantly as she did so, I heard a rustle behind me—two quick and violent blows descended on the back of my head, there was a flash before my eyes, a suppressed shout of exultation rang in my ears, and I fell insensible to the ground.

It was some time, on partially recovering my senses, before I could realize either what had occurred, or the situation in which I found myself. Gradually, however, the incidents attending the artfully-prepared treachery of Madame Jaubert grew into distinctness, and I pretty well comprehended my present position. I was lying at the bottom of a cart, blindfold, gagged, handcuffed, and covered over by what, from their smell, seemed to be empty corn sacks. The vehicle was moving at a pretty rapid rate, and judging from the roar and tumult without, through one of the busiest thoroughfares of London. It was Saturday evening; and I thought, from the character of the noises, and the tone of a clock just chiming ten, that we were in Tottenham Court Road. I endeavored to rise, but found, as I might have expected, that it was impossible to do so; my captors having secured me to the floor of the cart by strong cords. There was nothing for it, therefore, but patience and resignation; words easily pronounced, but difficult, under such circumstances, to realize in practice. My thoughts, doubtless in consequence of the blows I had received, soon became hurried and incoherent. A tumultuous throng of images swept confusedly past of which the most constant and frequent were the faces of my wife and youngest child, whom I had kissed in his sleep just previous to leaving home. Madame Jaubert and James Martin were also there; and ever and anon the menacing countenance of Levasseur stooped over me with a hideous expression; and I felt as if clasped in the fiery grasp of a

demon. I have no doubt that the voice which sounded in my ear at the moment I was felled to the ground must have suggested the idea of the Swiss—faintly and imperfectly as I caught it. The tumult of my brain only gradually subsided as the discordant uproar of the streets—which no doubt added to the excitement I was suffering under by suggesting the exasperating nearness of abundant help which could not be appealed to—died gradually away into a silence only broken by the rumble of the cart wheels, and the subdued talk of the driver and his companions, of whom there appeared to be two or three. At length the cart stopped, I heard a door unlocked and thrown open, and a few moments afterwards I was dragged from under the corn sacks, carried up three flights of stairs, and dropped brutally upon the floor till a light could be procured. Directly one was brought, I was raised to my feet, placed upright against a wooden partition, and staples having been driven into the paneling, securely fastened in that position, with cords passed through them, and round my armpits. This effected, an authoritative voice—the now distinct recognition of which thrilled me with dismay—ordered that I should be unblinded. It was done; and when my eyes became somewhat accustomed to the suddenly-dazzling light and glare, I saw Levasseur and the clerk Dubarle standing directly in front of me, their faces kindled into flame by fiendish triumph and delight. The report that they had been drowned was then a mistake, and they had incurred the peril of returning to this country for the purpose of avenging themselves upon me; and how could it be doubted that an opportunity achieved at such fearful risk, would be effectually, remorselessly used? A pang of mortal terror shot through me, and then I strove to awaken in my heart a stern endurance, and resolute contempt of death, with, I may now confess, very indifferent success. The woman Jaubert was, I also saw, present; and a man, whom I afterwards ascertained to be Martin, was standing near the doorway, with his back toward me. These two, at a brief intimation from Levasseur, went downstairs; and then the fierce exultation of the two escaped convicts—of Levasseur especially—broke forth with wolfish rage and ferocity. “Ha—ha—ha!” shouted the Swiss, at the same time striking me over the face with his open hand, “You find, then, that others can plot as well as you can—dog, traitor, scoundrel that you are! ‘Au revoir—alors!’ was it, eh? Well, here we are, and I wish you joy of the meeting. Ha—ha! How dismal the rascal looks Dubarle!”—(Again the coward struck me.)—“He is hardly grateful to me, it seems, for having kept my word. I always do, my fine fellow,” he added with a savage chuckle; “and never neglect to pay my debts of honor. Yours especially,” he continued, drawing a pistol from his pocket, “shall be prompt payment, and with interest too, scélerat!” He held the muzzle of the pistol to within a yard of my forehead, and placed his finger on the trigger. I instinctively closed my eyes, and tasted in that fearful moment the full bitterness of death; but my hour was not yet come. Instead of the flash and report which I expected would herald me into eternity, a taunting laugh from Levasseur at the terror he excited rang through the room.

“Come—come,” said Dubarle, over whose face a gleam of commiseration, almost of repentance, had once or twice passed; “You will alarm that fellow downstairs with your noise. We must, you know, wait till he is gone, and he appears to be in no hurry. In the meantime let us have a game of piquet for the first shot at the traitor’s carcass.”

“Excellent—capital!” shouted Levasseur, with savage glee. “A game of piquet; the stake your life, Waters! A glorious game! And mind you see fair play. In the meantime, here’s your health, and better luck next time, if you should chance to see it.” He swallowed a draught of wine which Dubarle, after helping himself, had poured out for him; and then approaching me, with the silver cup he had drained in his hand, said “Look at the crest! Do you recognize it—fool, idiot that you are!”

I did so, readily enough; it was a portion of the plunder carried off from Portman Square.

“Come,” again interposed Dubarle, “let us have our game.”

The play began, and— But I will dwell no longer upon this terrible passage in my police experience. Frequently even now the incidents of that night revisit me in dreams, and I awake with a start and cry of terror. In addition to the mental torture I endured, I was suffering under an agonizing thirst, caused by the fever of my blood, and the pressure of the absorbing gag, which still remained in my mouth. It was wonderful I did not lose my senses. At last the game was over; the Swiss won, and sprang to his feet with the roar of a wild beast.

At this moment Madame Jaubert entered the apartment somewhat hastily. “This man below,” she said, “is getting insolent. He has taken it into his tipsy head that you mean to kill your prisoner, and he won't, he says, be involved in a murder, which would be sure to be found out. I told him he was talking absurdly; but he is still not satisfied, so you had better go down and speak to him yourself.”

I afterwards found, it may be as well to mention here, that Madame Jaubert and Martin had been induced to assist in entrapping me, in order that I might be out of the way when a friend of Levasseur’s, who had been committed to Newgate on a serious charge, came to be tried, I being the chief witness against him; and they were both assured that I had nothing more serious to apprehend than a few day’s detention. In addition to a considerable money present, Levasseur had, moreover, promised Madame Jaubert to pay her expenses to Paris, and assist in placing her in business there.

Levasseur muttered a savage imprecation on hearing the woman’s message, and then said, “Come with me, Dubarle; if we cannot convince the fellow, we can at least silence him! Marie Duquesne, you will remain here.”

As soon as they were gone, the woman eyed me with a compassionate expression, and, approaching close to me, said, in a low voice, “Do not be alarmed at their tricks and menaces. After Thursday you will be sure to be released.”

I shook my head, and as distinctly as I could made a gesture with my fettered arms toward the table on which the wine was standing. She understood me. “If,” said she, “you will promise not to call out, I will relieve you of the gag.”

I eagerly nodded compliance. The gag was removed, and she held a cup of wine to my fevered lips. It was a draught from the waters of paradise, and hope, energy, life, were renewed within me as I drank.

“You are deceived,” I said, in a guarded voice, the instant my burning thirst was satisfied. “They intend to murder me, and you will be involved as an accomplice.”

“Nonsense,” she replied. “They have been frightening you, that’s all.”

“I again repeat you are deceived. Release me from these fetters and cords, give me but a chance of at least selling my life as dearly as I can, and the money you told me you stood in need of shall be yours.”

“Hark!” she exclaimed. “They are coming!”

“Bring down a couple of bottles of wine,” said Levasseur, from the bottom of the stairs. Madame Jaubert obeyed the order, and in a few minutes returned.

I renewed my supplications to be released, and was, of course, extremely liberal of promises.

“It is vain talking,” said the woman. “I do not believe they will harm you; but even if it were as you say, it is too late now to retrace my steps. You cannot escape. That fool below is already three-parts intoxicated; they are both armed, and would hesitate at nothing if they but suspected treachery.”

It was vain to urge her. She grew sullen and menacing, and was insisting that the gag should be placed in my mouth, when a thought struck me.

“Levasseur called you Marie Duquesne, just now; but surely your name is Jaubert—is it not?”

“Do not trouble yourself about my name,” she replied. “That is my affair, not yours.”

“Because if you *are* the Marie Duquesne who once kept a shop in Cranbourne Alley, and lost a child called Marie-Louise, I could tell you something.”

A wild light broke from her dark eyes, and a suppressed scream from her lips. “I am that Marie Duquesne!” she said in a voice tremulous with emotion.

“Then I have to inform you that the child so long supposed to be lost I discovered nearly three weeks ago.”

The woman fairly leaped towards me, clasped me fiercely by the arms, and peering in my face with eyes on fire with insane excitement, hissed out, “You lie—you lie, you dog! You are striving to deceive me! She is in heaven; the angels told me so, long since.”

I do not know, by the way, whether the falsehood I was endeavoring to palm off upon the woman was strictly justifiable or not; but I am fain to believe that there are few moralists that would not, under the circumstances, have acted pretty much as I did.

“If your child was lost when going on an errand to Coventry Street, and her name is Marie-Louise Duquesne, I tell you she is found. How should I otherwise have become acquainted with these particulars?”

“True—true,” she muttered: “How else should he know? Where is she?” added the woman, in tones of agonized intreaty, as she sank down and clasped my knees. “Tell me—tell me, as you hope for life or mercy, where I may find my child?”

“Release me, give me a chance of escape, and tomorrow your child shall be in your arms. Refuse, and the secret dies with me.”

She sprang quickly to her feet, unclasped the handcuffs, snatched a knife from the table, and cut the cords which bound me with eager haste. “Another draught of wine,” she said, still in the same hurried, almost insane manner. “You have work to do! Now, whilst I secure the door, do you rub and chafe your stiffened joints.” The door was soon fastened, and she assisted in restoring the circulation to my partially benumbed limbs. This was at last accomplished, and Marie Duquesne drew me towards a window, which she softly opened. “It is useless,” she whispered, “to attempt a struggle with the men below. You must descend by this,” and she placed her hand upon a lead water pipe, which reached from the roof to within a few feet of the ground.

“And you,” I said; “How are you to escape?”

“I will tell you. Do you hasten on towards Hampstead, from which we are distant in a northerly direction about a mile. There is a house at about half the distance. Procure help, and return as quickly as possible. The door fastenings will resist some time, even should your flight be discovered. You will not fail me?”

“Be assured I will not.” The descent was a difficult and somewhat perilous one, but it was safely accomplished, and I set off at the top of my speed toward Hampstead.

I had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile, when the distant sound of a horse’s feet, coming at a slow trot towards me, caught my ear. I paused, to make sure I was not deceived, and as I did so, a wild scream from the direction I had left, followed by another and another, broke upon the stillness of the night. The scoundrels had no doubt discovered my escape, and were about to wreak their vengeance upon the unfortunate creature in their power. The trot of the horse which I had heard was, simultaneously with the breaking out of those wild outcries, increased to a rapid gallop. “Hallo!” exclaimed the horseman as he came swiftly up. “Do you know where these screams come from?” It was the horse patrol who thus providentially came up! I briefly stated that the life of a woman was at the mercy of two escaped convicts. “Then, for God’s sake, jump up behind me!” exclaimed

the patrol. "We shall be there in a couple of minutes." I did so; the horse—a powerful animal, and not entirely unused to carry double—started off, as if it comprehended the necessity for speed, and in a very brief space of time we were at the door of the house from which I had so lately escaped. Marie Duquesne, with her body half out of the window, was still wildly screaming as we rushed into the room below. There was no one there, and we swiftly ascended the stairs, at the top of which we could hear Levasseur and Dubarle thundering at the door, which they had unexpectedly found fastened, and hurling a storm of imprecations at the woman within, the noise of which enabled us to approach them pretty nearly before we were heard or perceived. Martin saw us first, and his sudden exclamation alarmed the others. Dubarle and Martin made a desperate rush to pass us, by which I was momentarily thrown on one side against the wall, and very fortunately, as the bullet leveled at me from a pistol Levasseur held in his hand would probably have finished me. Martin escaped, which I was not very sorry for; but the patrol pinned Dubarle safely, and I gripped Levasseur with a strength and ferocity against which he was as powerless as an infant. Our victory was complete; and two hours afterwards, the recaptured convicts were safely lodged in a station house.

I caused Madame Duquesne to be as gently undeceived the next morning as possible with respect to her lost child; but the reaction and disappointment proved too much for her wavering intellect. She relapsed into positive insanity, and was placed in Bedlam, where she remained two years. At the end of that period she was pronounced convalescent. A sufficient sum of money was raised by myself and others, not only to send her to Paris, but to enable her to set up as a milliner in a small but respectable way. As lately as last May, when I saw her there, she was in health both of body and soul, and doing comfortably.

With the concurrence of the police authorities, very little was said publicly respecting my entrapment. It might perhaps have excited a monomania amongst liberated convicts—colored and exaggerated as every incident would have been for the amusement of the public—to attempt similar exploits. I was also anxious to conceal the peril I had encountered from my wife; and it was not till I had left the police force that she was informed of it. Levasseur and Dubarle were convicted of returning from transportation before the term for which they had been sentenced had expired, and were this time sent across the seas for life. The reporters of the morning papers, or rather the reporter for the *Times*, *Herald*, *Chronicle*, *Post*, and *Advertiser*, gave precisely the same account, even to the misspelling of Levasseur's name, dismissing the brief trial in the following paragraph under the head of "Old Bailey Sessions":—Alphonse Dubarle (24), and Sebastian Levasson (49) were identified as unlawfully returned convicts, and sentenced to transportation for life. The prisoners, it was understood, were connected with the late plate robbery in Portman Square; but as a conviction could not have increased their punishment, the indictment was not pressed."

Levasseur, I had almost forgotten to state, admitted that it was he who wounded me in Ryder's Court, Leicester Square.

*Harper's Monthly*, January 1851

Reprinted as "The Revenge" in

*The Buffalo Commercial*, January 16, 1851

*The Daily Sandusky*, March 18, 19, 20, 1851

*The Janesville Gazette* May 8, 1851

This story was originally published as "Recollections of a Police-Officer: The Revenge," in *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, November 9, 1850.

This story was later published in the collection *Recollections of a Detective Police-Officer* by William Russell, under the pseudonym Thomas Waters (London: J. & C. Brown & Co., 1856).

Prior to the British publication of this volume, a pirated collection of the stories—titled *Recollections of a Policeman by Thomas Waters, An Inspector in the London Detective Corps*—was published in America (New York: Cornish and Lamport, 1852).