

Dixon Hawke's Case Book—No. 4

gradually, as he absorbed Vesey's teaching and began to develop more character, she became interested in him.

"I studied them for a fortnight," said Dr Smith, "and it appeared to me that Pollitt was a type of half-successful commercial traveller ambitious to give up doing things by halves. I also gathered that the Vesey's had encouraged him to take part in some kind of dubious racket, though I had no idea, of course, that it was professional bomb-throwing."

The Double Explosion.

HAVING told what he knew of the strange trio, Dr Smith leaned forward and invited Hawke to tell him the rest of the story.

"Not all these recent bomb explosions have been the work of the I.R.A.," said Hawke. "Some of them have been the work of criminals in the pay of a hostile power interested in stopping our progress in defence work."

"Mr Herbert Rawson, the inventor of the Rawson Rangefinder, was obviously one of their chosen victims."

"As you know, a bomb was placed in a basement room of his house at Marsdale. It exploded at half-past nine on Wednesday night and wrecked his laboratory, which was situated upstairs."

"But it was another explosion that gave the affair its really queer aspect. It occurred near the back garden wall of an adjoining empty house some three-quarters of an hour before the explosion at Rawson's place, killing a man and a woman, afterwards identified as Maurice Pollitt and Mrs Vesey."

"A mongrel dog, of the terrier type, was found running about close to the scene of this fatality, and I believe you were one of the several patrons of that cafe who were able to identify the animal as Mrs Vesey's property."

Dr Smith nodded.

"A nondescript little brute of the

type of which women will make a fuss," he said. "Her husband detested the creature, and gave it many a sly prod with his boot. Pollitt seemed to see in it an opportunity of getting in Mrs Vesey's good books, and he patted it and made a fuss of it, much as she did."

Inspector Gray's Theory.

HAWKE considered this information thoughtfully for a moment. He had a regard for apparently trivial detail which his friends the police occasionally found irritating, but which had proved of the greatest value in the solution of many of his most famous cases.

"H'm. That's very interesting. It suggests a possibility different from that which my friend, Detective-Inspector Gray, is entertaining."

"And what, if I may ask, is his idea of it?"

"That the Vesey's and Pollitt had two bombs in their possession, and had a further call to make, after placing that one at Rawson's house."

"Yes?"

"That the second bomb, which was in the possession of Pollitt, or Mrs Vesey, exploded while they were keeping watch—while Vesey was actually planting the first bomb in Rawson's house."

"Inspector Gray's idea, of course, is that it exploded accidentally," said Dr Smith.

Hawke nodded.

"Whilst the crowd was gathering round, of course, Vesey, who would have heard the explosion, would be leaving Rawson's house, having planted his bomb. He would, one presumes, clear out of Marsdale as quickly as possible. I have undertaken to assist the police in tracing him."

"Any clues as to his possible whereabouts?"

"No. Not yet. The three were living in London flats, and they frequently changed their address. They

were careful not to carry any papers with them, and it is thought they did their business at different provincial centres from time to time."

The Time-table Clue.

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR Gray called later, and informed Hawke a trifle wearily that he had been making inquiries at every restaurant and public-house in Marsdale.

"I've been inquiring if anybody saw two men, a woman and a dog on Wednesday evening. You'd think that a sufficiently unusual combination for one particular Wednesday evening in a small town, wouldn't you? Well, the entire blessed populace of Marsdale seems to have resolved itself into cliques consisting of two men, a woman and a dog on this very special Wednesday evening."

Hawke smiled and offered the disgruntled police officer a cigarette.

"And you weren't able to pick up any clues?"

"There was one such group that called at 'The Brown Bear' at about half-past eight, and inquired for a time-table. They were strangers, and the landlord was able to agree to the description I gave him. But they dropped no hint of where they were meaning to go, and nobody at either the railway station or the bus depot is able to recall seeing anybody like Vesey leaving. It was a market day, and the town was a bit crowded."

Hawke had other work to dispose of, but half an hour after Gray's departure he gave himself up to speculation about the affair, and after a few minutes' thought and the study of a railway time-table he left the flat and boarded a train to Marsdale.

Some two hours later his assistant, Tommy Burke, received a phone message from him.

"Risden, Tommy. Do you know it? That's the name of the place where I am now. A small town, twenty miles

The Boomerang Bomb

beyond Marsdale. Come on down here, will you? Bring the Bentley. Something rather queer has happened. May prove significant."

Tommy met his employer by arrangement, outside Risden Post Office, by the side of which was a car-park.

Hawke, who had been keeping an unobtrusive vigil on a public-house called "The Spread Eagle," opposite, got in the car by Tommy's side.

"We'll hang on here for a while," he murmured.

"What's happened, sir? What's doing in this place?"

Hawke repeated Gray's information concerning the people who had borrowed the time-table.

"It occurred to me that there might be a clue there," he said, "because the print in those things is so small, and so difficult for the eye to follow, that most people trace the figures with their fingernails."

"The idea would have been brighter had the time-table been brand new, however, for this one was full of fingernail indentations."

"Anyway, there was a finger-nail indentation under the line of outgoing trains from Marsdale ending under the time 9.20—ten minutes before the explosion at Rawson's house. That was just about the one train the Vesey's and Pollitt would be likely to aim at catching—so as to be well on their way by the time the explosion occurred."

"I looked down the column for any marks which might indicate the destination, and there were three finger-nail marks in that particular column. They were opposite Woodford, Bramley, and Risden; and I went to Woodford, and then Bramley. They were both small villages, and the ticket-collectors, who know everybody using the stations, had seen no one answering to the description of Vesey."

It then occurred to me to see if I could make some use of that mongrel. The beast had had a plain collar with no name on it, and was in the care of the Marsdale police. I returned and