

Dixon Hawke's Case Book—No: 3

you," Dixon Hawke said, "the story of Nick's last innings. I met him when he had finished his seven years in Portland, and he laughed in my face and said he meant to score pretty heavily in his next innings. I had no idea then that he was already planning to secure the famous Star of Pietsdorff."

"The wonderful blue diamond from the Pietsdorff Mine!" Chief Inspector Deakin exclaimed. "But Temple never got it. The stone has been in Sir Richard Miskin's family for years, and——"

The Star of Pietsdorff.

"IF you keep butting in I'll never get through," Dixon Hawke protested good-naturedly. "As you say, the Star of Pietsdorff is an heirloom in the Miskin family, and is only worn on special occasions. One of those events happened four years ago—on the occasion of the twenty-fifth birthday of Sir Richard's married daughter, Mrs Helen Raynor."

"On the previous afternoon Miskin got the diamond from his safe-deposit here in London, and took it down to his place in Kent, Kenley Hall. He was playing into Temple's hands. At Kenley the gem was put into a powerful safe in the library, but there was never a safe that Nick Temple couldn't manipulate."

"To cut the story short, Temple arrived at Kenley that evening determined to play the next innings he had bragged about, and to secure the Star of Pietsdorff. The library at Kenley Hall is on the first floor, but Temple could climb like a cat."

"He got in?" one of the listeners queried.

"Yes, he got in," was the answer. "He did not wait until the small hours of the morning, probably realising that the windows would be secured by shutters. He selected his time when he judged the family would be at dinner."

"Yes, he had nerve enough for that," Deakin grunted.

"It was in the winter," Hawke con-

tinued, "and there was a fire burning in the library which gave Temple all the light he needed. The safe possessed a modern combination, but no doubt you remember that Temple had what we term the combination ear."

"By pressing his ear to the door and twirling the dial, he could follow the movement of the little metal tumblers in the lock, and gradually work out the necessary combination."

"He needed all his talent that night; the safe was one of the best manufactured in those times, although, of course, they have been improved upon since."

"A dozen times Nick Temple thought he had found the right combination, and each time he was a little out—only a little, but sufficient to make him mutter a good many curses under his breath. It took him so long that he knew the family had probably finished their dinner."

"He stuck to his job?" Deakin asked curiously.

"Yes. Temple was not the man to lose his nerve; each time he failed it only increased his determination to succeed. He did succeed in the end, the door of the safe swung open, and the red morocco case containing the priceless Star of Pietsdorff lay within reach of his hand. And then, gentlemen, Nick Temple was interrupted."

"He was nabbed?" jerked out Deakin.

"I said he was interrupted," Dixon Hawke answered. "He had purposely opened the door leading to the landing so that he could hear if anybody was coming, but he never heard a sound to warn him. Without an instant's warning the electric light was switched on and Temple, one hand gripping the butt of the revolver in his pocket, sprang up ready to fight for his freedom rather than submit to arrest again. All that was worst in the man rose to the surface at that moment."

"Yes, I guess it did," a little man with iron-grey hair murmured. "Who had interrupted Temple? Was it Sir Richard or a servant?"

The Gentleman Crook

"Neither"; he found himself face to face with a fair-haired, blue-eyed baby girl wearing her nightdress. Apparently not a formidable adversary, gentlemen, for a desperate criminal such as Nick Temple."

Dixon Hawke paused and began to fill his briar.

"Push ahead, old man," Deakin said. "You've got us guessing. Who was the kiddie?"

"Little Bessie Raynor, Sir Richard's grandchild."

"How did Nick silence the poor little beggar?"

"At that moment Temple was more dangerous than any beast," proceeded Hawke. "Had Bessie Raynor attempted to scream I think there is little doubt that Nick Temple's iron grip would have choked her to silence."

"She did not scream?" Deakin queried.

"No, she smiled at Temple and then lisped out: 'Is you the man come to mend the lectic lights? You've mended this one, 'cos it works now.' Gentlemen, it would take a far cleverer man than myself to describe Nick Temple's emotions when he heard these words. Anyway, I know that his fingers released their grip of his revolver, and he managed to smile back at the kiddie. 'Yes, baby,' he answered in low tones, 'I am the man who's come to mend the lights, and I have mended that one. But what are you doing here, baby? You ought to be in bed.'"

"You're not going to tell us that Nick Temple took the kiddie back to her nursery, Hawke?" one of the group protested with a laugh.

The Broken Doll.

SOMETHING even more surprising than that," Hawke answered. "Little Bessie Raynor, with all the dignity of five years, replied: 'My name isn't baby, it's Bessie. I've been to bed, and I waited till nurse had gone downstairs, and now I've come to find my dolly.'"

The doll, gentlemen, was lying on the hearthrug, and the youngster toddled forward and picked it up. At that moment one of her little feet caught in the rug, and she fell; the doll struck the fender-rail, and its head came off."

"Humph! Awkward moment for Temple," Deakin grunted.

"It was," Dixon Hawke agreed. "When the kiddie saw the decapitated doll her face puckered up, and Temple knew that the one thing he feared was imminent—the child was going to cry."

"There were three courses of action open to Nick, then, gentlemen. The first, as I have said, was to choke the child to silence; but he did not do it. The second was to bolt by the way he had come; but it contained a certain amount of risk. The child was old enough to understand that it was not usual for people to leave a house by way of the window; she might have screamed, and Temple might not have got clear away. The third alternative was to prevent the youngster from crying, and that is what Temple did."

"How?" one of the group questioned.

"By lifting her up in his arms," was the slow answer. "'Don't you cry, Bessie,' he whispered to her. 'I can mend dollies as well as lights, and I'll soon put your doll's head on again.'"

Dixon Hawke smiled.

"Can you imagine the picture, gentlemen?" he asked. "Nick Temple, ex-convict and cracksmen, seated in an armchair by the fire with the kiddie nestling confidently on his knee, while he fixed up the broken doll."

"Temple had an iron nerve, but his hands were not quite steady as he sat there, and he was doing mighty quick thinking, wondering how the deuce he was to persuade the child to go back to bed, so that he could secure the swag and make his getaway unnoticed. At last the doll was repaired. 'Now, run back to bed, Bessie,' Nick said as he restored it to the smiling child, 'or you will get into trouble with nurse.'"

"She went?"

Dixon Hawke shook his head.