

Dixon Hawke's Case Book—No. 16

"Quite unnecessary," was Hawke's astonishing reply.

Shortly after half-past eleven that night, Hawke was at the cross-roads on Wystbourne Common. It was a wild and lonely spot, with straight roads meeting miles from anywhere.

Hawke Keeps a Promise

HAWKE drew his car up at the roadside and sat waiting, a neat brown attache case on his lap. He had not long to wait before lights showed far in the distance down one of the roads and grew into the unmistakable shape of an ordinary car. It slithered to a stop in a dark patch of shadow. The lights were switched off; for a moment all was dark and still, then side and tail lights shone again.

Hawke quietly stepped from his car and walked across to the waiting car.

"Any dirty work afoot, Hawke?" queried Jackdaw's voice out of the darkness.

"No police hidden behind hedges, no weapons on me—I keep my promise," retorted the detective.

"I think you're telling the truth," came the reply. "We've kept a sharp watch around here. You haven't a bomb in that case, have you, so that it will blow up when I open it?"

"Do you want me to open it?" queried Hawke, peering into the car, where he could just make out the hunched figure of Jackdaw.

"Yes," decided the crook.

"Show me first that you've kept your part of the bargain!" ordered Hawke. "Where is Tommy?"

With a light laugh, Jackdaw

reached over and turned a switch, and for an instant a faint light lit up the interior of the car. Hawke saw that Tommy Burke was there, stretched out on the back seat. He was very pale, bound and gagged, and, crouching over him, was an enormous figure.

Before the light was extinguished, Hawke saw that the muzzle of a pistol was pressed against the side of his assistant's head.

"Are you going to open that case?" demanded Jackdaw.

For answer, Hawke opened up the case and handed over a packet of one-pound notes.

"Good! That's the stuff I want," decided Jackdaw, reaching out greedily and ruffling the notes, eyeing them carefully as he did so. Then he took the case with the rest of the money.

When he drew back, Hawke saw that he held a small automatic in his hand.

"You're a queer fish, Hawke," Jackdaw muttered. "I expected you to attack me then. That's why I was prepared."

"I have kept my promise—I always do," snapped the detective. "Now, you keep yours."

"Certainly!" Jackdaw uttered a quick order, the door of the car opened, and Tommy Burke was rolled out into the road.

At the same moment the car leapt forward, accelerated and sped away.

"But, Guv'nor, you shouldn't have done it!" protested Tommy Burke. "I mean, it's not just the five thousand quid, but letting a thug like that get away with it! I'd have found a way of escaping."

To the young detective's amazement, Hawke only chuckled drily, as he helped his assistant into the car.

The Last Laugh

"AREN'T we going after them?" asked Tommy, when the car turned in the opposite direction to that taken by the crooks.

"We are going to Wystbourne Police Station, where I have an appointment," was Hawke's surprising reply.

Hawke's first question on arrival at Wystbourne Police Station only added to Tommy's bewilderment.

"Well, any peculiar motorists picked up yet, Sergeant?" queried the detective.

"Yes, sir," replied the local sergeant, looking as though he, too, was not quite sure if he was on his head or his heels. "Call just come from Wellsea. Two men picked up there in a car—neither in a fit state to drive. Both of 'em were rolling about, shrieking with laughter and waving handfuls of pound-notes."

"Got them!" exclaimed Hawke jubilantly.

Before he hurried to Wellsea Police Station, he put a call through to Chief Detective-Inspector M'Phinney at Scotland Yard, with the result that that bewildered officer was soon on the scene.

M'Phinney arrived to find two men under arrest. One was a smart, keen-faced young fellow, who frankly confessed that he called himself Jackdaw.

"His real name is Heaton-Smith, an ex-Commando, who has made the

The Laughing Jackdaw

mistake of thinking he can make money more easily by crime than honest work," explained Hawke. "A few years in jail for abduction and demanding money with menaces will show him the error of his ways. His real trouble is a perverted sense of humour."

Hawke turned to the other prisoner, whom M'Phinney recognised instantly.

"Calls himself Killer," said Hawke "but records at the Yard have him down as Butch Horton, who has already done many stretches for robbery with violence. A thoroughly bad type. It will be good to have him out of circulation for a long time."

"It will," agreed M'Phinney, "but look here, Hawke, this isn't good enough! How on earth did you catch them?"

For answer, Hawke pointed to the strange collection of one-pound notes which littered the table at the police station.

"I kept my promise—no police traps, no guns, not even marked money," he chuckled. "All I did was to impregnate those notes with a compound formed from nitrous oxide—the laughing gas used by dentists—intoxicating stuff, which makes those who inhale it quite light-headed."

"That's why I kept my head turned away when opening the case, although I knew it would take several minutes for the fumes from the notes to do their work," he told the crestfallen Jackdaw.

"It struck me that you like a laugh," concluded Hawke, "so I thought I'd give you one. But the last laugh is mine!"