

Dixon Hawke's Case Book—No: 3

"I dunno what 'appened, sir. I was standing in the crowd, and all at once I came over dizzy. Me 'and slipped, and when I felt better I was gripping a bunch of fivers!"

Hawke tried to hide a grin. "You mean you picked somebody's pocket," he said. He turned and nodded to the chief inspector. "Just what I thought," he went on. "The Dip is not the type to go in for the other business."

Baxter's lips pressed together in a tight line. He appeared to disagree with the criminologist, and fixed his cold, blue eyes on the prisoner. When he spoke, there was an ugly rasp to his voice.

"You're booked for seven years' hard labour if you don't tell us the truth! The money we found on you was forged! You were passing it, and that's a serious crime. Who put you up to it?"

Not His Game.

THE look of resignation on the Dip's face abruptly vanished. His mouth opened and his eyes widened. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, and he lurched to his feet, stuttering in scared excitement.

"Forged? Now, you're 'aving me on, Mr Baxter! Don't go and tell me I dipped a cove who was carrying that round with him! Strewth! You don't think I'd be so dishonest as to work for a gang of crooks?"

"You can't bluff your way out of this! Where did you get the money?"

"I'm talking straight!" stuttered the pickpocket. "I dipped a cove at the races. There was a 'undred quid in his wallet. I put it in my pocket and tossed the wallet away. Then I went off 'ome. Honest, that's all I know about it!"

The stern face of the chief inspector showed no signs of relaxing, and panic gripped Larry the Dip. He knew what sentence he might expect if he were convicted of forgery—seven years or longer, and in a jail like Pentonville or

Dartmoor. Little wonder that his speech became incoherent.

"You've got to believe me! I didn't know the stuff was forged. Cripes, I wouldn't touch hot money! I ain't got the nerve. Listen, Mr Baxter—"

"I'll listen when you tell the truth!"

"I can't tell what I don't know!"

The Dip turned to Dixon Hawke, who was puffing at his pipe and looking at the ceiling. "You give a bloke a square deal!" the little crook said. "Get me out of this. I ain't guilty—see that wet and see that dry, I ain't!"

"Mr Hawke is not interested," barked Baxter. "For the last time, Dip, who gave you that money?"

"I told yer! I pinched it! I——"

"Take him away!" said the C.I.D. chief. "Take him away and book him for passing bad money!"

"It's a frame-up!" howled the pickpocket. "You're sending me up for something I ain't done! I'll get you for this! You—you——"

The Dip's voice floated back from the corridor as he was dragged out by two burly detectives. He was still screaming abuse, but that was quite a usual thing for a prisoner to do after an interview with the granite rock of a chief inspector.

When peace was finally restored, Dixon Hawke tapped out his pipe and gave his colleague a quick glance. They had been working on the forgery case for three weeks, and this was the first clue they had unearthed.

A Clever Gang.

THERE were clever men in the gang. Not only had they turned out an almost perfect note, but they appeared to have foolproof methods of passing the money. The country was being flooded with the fakes, and the division of the C.I.D. which specialised in forgery cases was working night and day to check the flow.

"If this was America I'd third-degree the Dip," Baxter said. "He knows who's making the money!"

"I don't agree with you!"

"What! You swallow his story?"

"Completely. He picked a man's pockets, and that man was the crook we're trying to find. The Dip is innocent!"

"You're wrong, Hawke!"

"I'm going to prove I'm right!" the criminologist said quietly. "I want a free hand for a week, and if I don't lay the gang by the heels, then I'll resign from the case!"

Hawke on His Own.

DIXON HAWKE walked slowly up the Thames Embankment after leaving the Yard. He had a lot to think about, for the case might well represent the turning-point in his career.

Already the flood of forged money had caused sarcastic comments both in the House of Commons and the press. The newspapers were thundering for an overhaul of the C.I.D. machinery, and something was likely to happen if quick results were not obtained.

In the circumstances Hawke could understand why Chief Inspector Baxter clung so desperately to the idea of the Dip's guilt. It was his last hope, and if he failed the resignation of one of the finest officers at the Yard would be a certainty.

"But he's quite wrong," the criminologist mused. "The Dip hasn't the courage for such big-time crime as forgery. His story is true. He picked up those fake notes by mistake."

Hawke found himself near Blackfriars by the time he had come to a decision about his line of action. He crossed the road and made his way to Fleet Street, stopping to see an acquaintance who was on the staff of a big newspaper.

The journal in question had been loudest in its criticism of the police, and the criminologist's friend greeted him with a cynical smile.

"Come to tell us you've caught the crooks!" he asked.

The Pickpocket Decoy

"In the words of the Yard, a strong clue is being followed up, and early developments are expected."

"A good gag, Hawke, but we're tired of it."

"Hold your horses!" The criminologist smiled and leaned confidentially toward the newspaper man. "The truth is we're on the right track at last. We picked up a wallet at Rushmoor race course, and it was packed with the forged money. A certain gentleman known as Larry the Dip was in possession of the wallet. He says he can recognise the man he took it from!"

"That sounds like action! Can we publish it?"

"It'll do no harm," Hawke said casually.

He smiled as he left the building and hailed a taxi. On the way to his chambers in Dover Street he reflected on the effect of the news on the forgery gang. There would be something in the nature of a panic.

Hawke telephoned Baxter to tell him what he had done. The chief inspector raged for several minutes without stopping for breath, but when he finally choked into silence the criminologist gave an explanation of his actions.

"The Dip is useless to you," he said. "With the help of the papers, I'm going to make him the decoy to catch our men. He's being brought up before the magistrate to-morrow, isn't he?"

"What of it?"

"Arrange for him to be released!"

"Eh? Are you mad, Hawke?"

"I want the Dip set free, Baxter, on grounds of insufficient evidence! You can always pick him up again on a new charge if my plan fails."

"It'll cost me my job," the C.I.D. man growled. "But I'll have to resign in any case, so I'll do what you say. You always were lucky, Hawke!"

"Thanks!"

The criminologist smiled as he rang off. He was trying a gigantic bluff, and it was not the first time in his career he