

# The BLACK GANG

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SAPPER.

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## AN OWL HOOTS

SYNOPSIS.—To a gathering of anarchists in Parkins, London suburb, Zaboleff, foreign agitator, tells of the operations of a body of men who have become a menace to their activities. He says they are masked and wear long black cloaks and are acting without the law. He is interrupted by the men he is describing (the Black Gang), who break up the meeting, sentencing some of the participants to condign punishment and carrying away others. A memorandum found on Zaboleff gives an address in Hoxton, which the leader of the attacking party considers of importance. Sir Bryan Johnstone, director of criminal investigation, hears from Inspector McIver, sent to arrest Zaboleff the night before, of his discomfiture. He had been seized and chloroformed and his raid frustrated. Hugh Drummond, man of leisure, tells Johnstone of seeing the kidnapers and their victims. He becomes an unpaid agent of the police, under McIver. William Atkinson, ostensibly pawnbroker and money lender, really Count Zadova, director of anarchy in England, does business in another London suburb. A mysterious stranger invades the premises.

## CHAPTER III—Continued

In blissful ignorance of the sad plight of the clerk below, two men were sitting in this room, deep in conversation. In a chair drawn up close to the desk was no less a person than Charles Latter, M. P., and it was he who was doing most of the talking. But it was the other man who riveted attention: the man who presumably was Mr. Atkinson himself.

At first he seemed to be afflicted with an almost phenomenal stoop, and it was only when one got nearer that the reason was clear. The man was a hunchback, and the effect it gave was that of a huge bird of prey. Unlike most hunchbacks, his legs were of normal length, and as he sat motionless in his chair, a hand on each knee, staring with unwinking eyes at his talkative companion, there was something menacing and implacable in his appearance. His hair was gray; his features stern and hard; while his mouth reminded one of a steel trap. But it was his eyes that dominated everything—gray-blue and piercing, they seemed able to probe one's innermost soul. A man to whom it would be unwise to lie—a man utterly unscrupulous in himself, who would yet punish double-dealing in those who worked for him with merciless severity. A dangerous man.

"So you went to the police, Mr. Latter," he remarked suavely. "And what had our friend Sir Bryan Johnstone to say on the matter?"

"At first, count, he didn't say much. In fact he really said very little all through. But once he looked at the note his whole manner changed. I could see that instantly. There was something about the note which interested him. . . .

"Let me see it," said the count, holding out his hand.

"I left it with Sir Bryan," answered the other. "He asked me to let him keep it. And he promised that I should be all right."

The count's lips curled.

"It would take more than Sir Bryan Johnstone's promise, Mr. Latter, to insure your safety. Do you know whom that note was from?"

"I thought, count," said the other a little tremulously—"I thought it might be from this mysterious Black Gang that one has heard rumors about."

"It was," replied the count tersely. "Heaven's!" stammered Latter. "Then it's true; they exist."

"In the last month," answered the hunchback, staring fixedly at his frightened companion, "nearly twenty of our most useful men have disappeared. They have simply vanished into thin air. I know, no matter how, that it is not the police; the police are as mystified as we are. But the police, Mr. Latter, whatever views they may take officially are in all probability unofficially very glad of our friends' disappearance. At any rate until last night."

"What do you mean?" asked the other.

"Last night the police were balked of their prey, and McIver doesn't like being balked. You know Zaboleff was sent over?"

"Yes, of course. That is one of the reasons I came around tonight. Have you seen him?"

"I have not," answered the count grimly. "The police found out he was coming."

Mr. Latter's face blanched: the thought of Zaboleff in custody didn't appeal to him. It may be mentioned that his feelings were purely selfish—Zaboleff knew too much.

But the Count was speaking again. A faint sneer was on his face; he had read the other's mind like an open book.

"And so," he continued, "did the Black Gang. They removed Zaboleff and our friend Waldock from under the very noses of the police, and, like the twenty others, they have disappeared."

"My G—d!" There was no doubt now about Mr. Latter's state of mind. "And now they've threatened me," agreed the count. "And you, I am glad to say, have done exactly what I should have told you to do, had I seen

you sooner. You have gone to the police."

"But—but," stammered Latter, "the police were no good to Zaboleff last night."

"And it is quite possible," returned the other calmly, "that they will be equally futile in your case. Candidly, Mr. Latter, I am completely indifferent on the subject of your future. You have served our purpose, and all that matters is that you happen to be the bone over which the dogs are going to fight. Until last night the dogs hadn't met—officially; and in the rencontre last night, the police dog, unless I'm greatly mistaken, was caught by surprise. McIver doesn't let that happen twice. In your case he'll be ready. With luck this cursed black gang, who are infinitely more a nuisance to me than the police have been or ever will be, will get bitten badly."

Mr. Latter was breathing heavily. "But what do you want me to do, count?"

"Nothing at all, except what you were going to do normally," answered the other.

"Hullo! What's up?"

From a little electric bell at his elbow came four shrill rings, repeated again and again.

The count rose, and with systematic thoroughness swept every piece of paper off the desk into his pocket. Then he shut down the top and locked it, while the bell, a little muffled, still rang inside.

"What's the fool doing?" he cried angrily, stepping over to the big safe left into the wall, while Latter, his face white and terrified, followed at his side. And then abruptly the bell stopped.

Very deliberately the count pressed two concealed knobs, so sunk into the wall as to be invisible to a stranger, and the door of the safe swung open. And only then was it obvious that the safe was not a safe, but a second exit leading to a flight of stairs. For a moment or two he stood motionless, listening intently, while Latter fidgeted at his side. One hand was on a master switch which controlled all the lights, the other on a knob inside the second passage which, when turned, would close the great steel door noiselessly behind them.

He was frowning angrily, but gradually the frown was replaced by a look of puzzled surprise. Four rings from the shop below was the recognized signal for urgent danger, and everybody's plan of action was cut and dried for such an emergency. In the other rooms every book and paper in the slightest degree incriminating were hurried pell-mell into secret recesses in the floor which had been specially constructed under every table. In their place appeared books carefully and very skillfully faked, purporting to record the business transactions of Mr. William Atkinson.

In the big room at the end the procedure was even simpler. The count merely passed through the safe door and vanished through his private bolt-hole, leaving everything in darkness. And should inconvenient visitors ask inconvenient questions—well, it was Mr. Atkinson's private office, and a very nice office too, though at the moment he was away.

Thus the procedure—simple and sound; but on this occasion something seemed to have gone wrong. Instead of the industrious silence of clerks working overtime on affairs of financial import, a perfect babel of voices became audible in the passage. And then there came an agitated knocking on the door.

"Who is it?" cried the count sharply. It may be mentioned that even the most influential members of his staff knew better than to come into the room without previously obtaining permission.

"It's me, sir—Cohen," came an agitated voice from outside.

For a moment the count paused; then with a turn of the knob he closed the safe door silently. With an imperious hand he waved Latter to a chair, and resumed his former position at the desk.

"Come in," he snapped.

It was a strange and unwholesome object that obeyed the order, and the count sat back in his chair.

"What the devil have you been doing?"

A pair of rich blue-black eyes, and a nose from which traces of blood still trickled had not improved the general appearance of the assistant downstairs. In one hand he carried a piece of paper, and he brandished them alternately while a flood of incoherent frenzy burst from his lips.

For a minute or two the count listened, until his first look of surprise gave way to one of black anger.

"Am I to understand, you wretched little worm," he snarled, "that you gave the urgency danger signal, not once but half a dozen times, merely because a man hit you over the nose?"

"But he knocked me silly, sir," quavered the other. "And when I came to, and saw the boots lying beside me and the till opened, I kind of lost my head. I didn't know what had happened, sir—and I thought I'd better ring the bell—in case of trouble."

He retreated a step or two toward

the door, terrified out of his wits by the look of diabolical fury in the hunchback's eyes. Three or four clerks, who had been surreptitiously peeping through the open door, melted rapidly away, while from his chair Mr. Latter watched the scene fascinated. He was reminded of a bird and a snake, and suddenly he gave a little shudder as he realized that his own position was in reality much the same as that of the unfortunate Cohen.

And then just as the tension was becoming unbearable there came the interruption. Outside in the passage, clear and distinct, there sounded twice the hoot of an owl. To Mr. Latter it meant nothing; to the frightened little Jew it meant nothing; but on the count the effect was electrical. With a quickness incredible in one so deformed he was at the door, and into the passage, hurling Cohen out of his way into a corner. His powerful fists were clenched by his side; the veins in his neck were standing out like whipcord. But to Mr. Latter's surprise he made no movement, and rising from his chair he too peered round the door along the passage, only to stagger back after a second or two with a feeling of sick fear in his soul, and a sudden dryness in the throat. For twenty yards away, framed in the doorway at the head of the stairs leading down to the office below, he had seen a huge, motionless figure. For a perceptible time he had stared at it, and it had seemed to stare at him. Then the door had shut, and on the other side a key had turned. And the figure had been draped from head to foot in black.

Charles Latter was unmoral rather than immoral: he was a constitutional coward with a strong liking for underhand intrigue, and he was utterly and entirely selfish. In his way he was ambitious; he wanted power, but, though in many respects he was distinctly able, he lacked that essential factor—the ability to work for it. He hated work; he wanted easy results. And to obtain lasting results is not easy, as Mr. Latter gradually discovered. A capability for making flashy speeches covered with a veneer of cleverness is an undoubted asset, but it is an asset the value of which has been gauged to a nicety by the men who count. And so as time went on, and the epoch-making day when he had been returned to parliament faded into the past, Mr. Latter realized himself for what he was—a thing of no account. And the realization was as gall and wormwood to his soul. It is a realization which comes to many men, and it takes them different ways. Some become resigned—some make new and even more futile efforts; some see the humor of it, and some don't. Mr. Latter didn't; he became spiteful. And a spiteful coward is a nasty thing.

It was just about that time that he met Count Zadova. It was at dinner at a friend's house, and after the ladies had left he found himself sitting next to the hunchback with the strange, piercing eyes. He wasn't conscious of having said very much; he would have been amazed had he been told that within ten minutes this charming foreigner had read his unpleasant little mind like a book, and had reached a certain and definite decision. In fact, looking back on the past few months, Mr. Latter was at a loss to account as to how things had reached their present pass. Had he been told when he stood for parliament, flaunting all the old hackneyed formulae, that within two years he would be secretly engaged in red-hot Communist work, he would have laughed the idea to scorn. Anarchy, too; a nasty word, but the only one that fitted the bomb outrage in Manchester, which he had himself organized. Sometimes in the night, he used to wake and lie sweating as he thought of that episode.

And gradually it had become worse and worse. Little by little the charming Count Zadova, realizing that Mr. Latter possessed just those gifts which he could utilize to advantage, had ceased to be charming. There were many advantages in having a member of parliament as chief liaison officer.

There had been that first small slip when he signed a receipt for money paid him to address a revolutionary meeting in South Wales during the coal strike. And the receipt specified the service rendered. An unpleasant document in view of the fact that his principal supporters in his constituency were coal-owners. And after that the descent had been rapid.

Why should the hoot of an owl and a figure in black create such fear? More mystery.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## Times Had Changed

The salesman who had been turned away several times remarked to the office boy with fine sarcasm:

"Well, I suppose the boss is in conference again this morning?"

The office boy flipped a paper wad at the stenographer before he replied:

"No, sir; not in conference. He's sworn off golf."

## Mind and Soul

It is the mind that makes the man, and our vigor is in our immortal soul.

—Ovid.

## Renee Adoree



Miss Adoree, the "movie" star, is one of the screen's most beautiful and talented actresses. She is well known in this country as a capable actress and is famed abroad for her interpretative dancing.

## Among the NOTABLES

### GEORGE IV

GEORGE IV seems to have been the last of the ancient order of kings—the last of those who could do as they chose without regard to morals or public opinion. Where, a few generations before him, immorality and extravagance were taken as matters of course by the people, in George IV's time they brought down great unpopularity on his head.

He was the eldest son of George III, was born August 12, 1762, at St. James palace, and was naturally rather gifted. His tutor said he would be either the most polished gentleman, or the worst scoundrel in Europe—and he was both. He opposed his father in everything; took up a separate residence at Carlton house, but gave it up because of his debts; and was constantly having parliament vote hursms to square him up with his creditors.

There was one good influence in his life: the beautiful Mrs. Fitzherbert, a widow at twenty-five, and older than the prince. He was passionately devoted to her—an open marriage was impossible, of course, and she was a Catholic besides, but the pope assured her that her marriage was valid. For almost ten years they lived together, mostly at Brighton, until his actions caused her to separate from him. Then he consented to marry the German princess Charlotte, whom he treated so brutally that she, too, was forced to separate from him. Twenty-five years after this he became king, and died after a ten-year reign. His treatment of the queen added to his unpopularity. Politically his reign was not so very important.

(By George Matthew Adams.)

## WHEN I WAS TWENTY-ONE

BY JOSEPH KAYE

At 21—Senator Willis Was a Farm Laborer.

"AT THE age of twenty-one my ambitions were beyond what I was doing but for a ready means of livelihood I combined the duties of farm laborer and schoolteacher. In my spare time I studied.

"Teaching eventually led me into a professorship of law at the University of Northern Ohio, from which college I got my B. A. when I was twenty-two.—Frank E. Willis."

TODAY—Senator Willis is one of the most noted politicians in the country. Aside from his legislative work he has established a high reputation as an orator and is in continual demand for public speaking.

In 1915 Mr. Willis was elected governor of Ohio and he was sent to the senate six years later.

(By McClure Newspaper Syndicate.)

## A LINE O' CHEER

By John Kendrick Bangs.

## ON A STORMY DAY

THE winds are fierce, and sharp the air, And yet I shall not heed them.

For in my battles with dull care I somehow think I need them.

'Tis good to have the weather kind, And free from tempests stormy, Yet in the rougher days I find A tonic better for me.

There's a freshness in the arctic breeze, And all this wintry rigor, That more than comfortable ease Contributes to my vigor.

So rage, ye blizzards, as ye may, What chill it pleases ye fling me!

I'll seize the gifts of health the day Tempestuous shall bring me.

(By McClure Newspaper Syndicate.)

## BEADED GOWNS CONTINUE SWAY; OFF-THE-FACE BRIMS IN FAVOR

BEADED frocks continue to flash their glittering beauty across the path of fashion. Through loveliness of coloring and unique design these sheathlike dresses weighted with beads, rhinestones, pearls and paillettes continue to cast their enchantment over resplendent dance, dinner and other formal evening functions.

The most entrancing models are alps of daintiness whose sole purpose seems to be to serve as a background

and lines of beauty through foldings, plaits, indentations and undulations which mark the modish upturning of their brims.

Many of the just-off-the-boat Paris hats are inclined to be medium or large and they have brims of taffeta or silk manipulated after the manner of those in the group herewith, the crowns being in many instances of straw.

This is to be a season of graceful



An Entrancing Model.

or setting which shall accent the scintillating beauty and intricacies of the beaded design worked thereon.

Like stars on a summer-night sky do rhinestones express their sparkling way on many a satin or georgette slip. Sometimes the idea is elaborated with pearl and crystal-laden pointed tabs as in the picture herewith. This exquisite frock is typical of the season's beaded modes. It may be pale pink, mauve or rose, for all the pastel tints, also white, are fashionable. Bead fringe embellished this evening frock, for bead fringe is an outstanding item of fashion interest this season.

There is an extensive use of tiny silver or gold beads on the modern-designed evening frock. A very handsome conception covers an almond-green georgette background heavily with design developed in the dimi-

adjustable brims. Even the newer shaded felt gigolo shapes, with tall, curiously creased crowns which are so popular, have brims which may be pulled down or rolled up at a becoming angle.

Captions such as ruffian, sombrero and pirate as applied to advance fashionable millinery suggest that brims are taking on a somewhat reckless yet fascinating freedom of lines. Which fact, however, but bespeaks the exceeding grace and picturesqueness of hats for the immediate future.

A leading material employed in the making of midseason hats is bright-colored silk faille. Soft greens and rose tones find favor for town-wear millinery. There is a tremendous vogue for bois de rose and allied shades. Most charming with the fur coat is either a velours or faille hat



Group of Stylish Hats.

five gold beads. There is a festooning of gold fringe in tiers about the skirt. This straight-lined frock is worn over a costume slip of gold cloth.

Pale pink and white beaded gowns which bespeak simplicity in their general aspect, but which are really wonderfully constructed, are the preferred models. These are artistically all-over patterned with rhinestones and mother-of-pearl paillettes.

Perhaps no frock more eloquently bespeaks the elegance of evening mode than does the beaded kind.

Returned to fashion's favor are off-the-face brims. It will be seen from the models here pictured that the

in dull rose with a single large flower of match color reposing low on the brim to the right side.

An increasing vogue for velvet ribbon is registered in arriving models. The blending of colors in velvet ribbons is one of the ideas emphasized in a trimming way.

A great deal of importance is ascribed to the subject of belting ribbon. The narrow is used for trimming, the wide for making hats.

JULIA BOTTOMLEY.  
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