



The BLACK GANG

A Sequel to Bulldog Drummond.

BY CYRIL MCNEILE SAPPER
W.H.O. Service

BULLDOG DRUMMOND is back! The hero of the most exciting mystery story in many months of the drama that thrilled audiences for more than two years and which, on the moving-picture screen, is still being shown to gasping thousands—returns as the cool-headed, Napoleonic leader of the greatest pack that ever hunted an arch-criminal and his confederates.

Here is the incessantly exciting and capitally humorous story of Bulldog Drummond's private war to a finish with Carl Peterson, the girl Irma and their merciless crew. And what a finish! In the story of "The Black Gang," Cyril McNeile has carried to an unsurpassable climax the adventures of Hugh Drummond at the head of a personal secret service operating in modern London, equally at home in the Whitechapel slums and amid the splendors of the Ritz.

Under the pen name of "Sapper," Mr. McNeile had been keeping the British public awake nights with a series of exciting tales, mostly based upon the events of the late war. He did not come into real fame, however, until he wrote an after-the-war story, "Bulldog Drummond," taking for his principal character a demobilized officer who found peace too dull and decided upon a round of action that would liven things up a bit. The story was written in a sort of British-American vein, partaking of the styles of stirring fiction writers on both sides of the Atlantic and bringing in international participants. The combination served to awaken further the British public and was even a greater success in America. The idea of "The Black Gang" seems to have been taken from a certain organization in the United States which you will have no trouble in recognizing, although Mr. McNeile's creation is more transient and more for the purposes of humor and adventure than the one with which we are familiar in America.

CHAPTER I

In Which Things Happen Near Barking Creek.

THE wind howled dismally round a house standing by itself almost on the shores of Barking creek.

The house seemed deserted. Every window was shattered; the garden was uncared for and a mass of weeds; the gate leading on to the road, apparently feeling the need of a deficient top hinge, propped itself drunkenly on what once had been a flower-bed. A few gloomy trees swaying dismally in the wind surrounded the house and completed the picture—one that would have caused even the least imaginative of men to draw his coat a little tighter round him, and feel thankful that it was not his fate to live in such a place.

But then few people ever came near enough to the house to realize its sinister appearance. The road—it was little better than a cart track—which passed the gate, was out of the beaten way; only an occasional fisherman or farm laborer ever used it, and that generally by day, when things assumed their proper proportion, and it was merely an empty house gradually failing to pieces through lack of attention. At night they avoided it if possible; folks did say that twelve years ago some prying explorer had found the bones of a skeleton lying on the floor in one of the upstairs rooms with a mildewed rope fixed to one end of the beams in the ceiling. And then it had been empty for twenty years.

Even now when the wind lay in the east or northeast and the tide was setting in, there were those who said that you could see a light shining through the cracks of the shutters in that room upstairs, and that, should a man climb up and look in, he'd see no skeleton, but a body with purple face and staring eyes swinging gently to and fro, and tied by the neck to a beam with a rope which showed no trace of mildew. Ridiculous, of course; but then so many of these local superstitions are. Useful, too, in some cases; they afford a privacy from the prying attentions of local gossip far more cheaply and effectively than high walls and bolts and bars.

So, at any rate, one of the two men who were walking briskly along the rough track seemed to think.

"Admirable," he remarked, as he paused for a moment at the entrance of the weed-grown drive. "Quite admirable, my friend. A house situated as this one is, is an acquisition and when it is haunted in addition it becomes a godsend."

He spoke English perfectly with a slight foreign accent, and his companion nodded abruptly.

"From what I heard about it I thought it would do," he answered. "Personally, I think it's a damnable spot, but since you were so set against coming to London I had to find something in this neighborhood."

"I will explain my reasons in due course," said the first speaker shortly. "You may take it from me that they were good. What's that?"

He swung round with a little gasp clutching his companion's arm.

"Nothing," cried the other irritably. "For a moment or two they stood still, peering into the dark un-

held a tremor of excitement, while the others leaned forward eagerly. "Is he, then, in Holland?"

"Who is he—this man we're always hearing about and never seeing?" demanded one of the three clerks aggressively.

"He is—the Chief," replied the other, while his eyes seemed to bore into the speaker's brain. "Just that—and no more. And that is quite enough for you." His glance traveled round the room, and his audience relaxed. "By the way, is not that a silence in the shutter there?"

"All the safer," grunted Flash Jim, "Any passing will think the ghost is walking."

"Nevertheless, kindly cover it up," ordered Zaboleff, and one of the Jews and wedged his pocket handkerchief into the crack. There was silence in the room while he did so, a silence broken only by the mournful hooting of an owl outside.

"Owls is the only things wot comes to this d—n museum," said Flash Jim morosely. "Owls and blinkin' fools like us."

"Stow it Jim," snarled Waldeck furiously. "Anyons would think you wanted a nurse!"

"Gentlemen—please," Zaboleff held up a protesting hand. "We do not want to prolong matters, but one or two explanations are necessary. To return, then, to these things that have happened recently, and which necessitated a fresh rendezvous for this evening—one which our friend Mr. Waldeck so obligingly found.

Three messengers sent out during the last three weeks bearing instructions and—what is more important—money, have disappeared."

"Blimey!" muttered Flash Jim; "is it the police?"

"It is not the police, which is what makes it so much more serious," answered Zaboleff quietly, and Flash Jim breathed a sigh of relief. "It is easy to keep within the law, but if our informant is correct we are up against a body of men who are not within the law themselves. A body of men who are absolutely unscrupulous and utterly ruthless; a body of men who appear to know our secret plans as well as we do, and the difficulty of it is, gentlemen, that though legally speaking, on account of the absurd legislation in this country we may keep within the law ourselves, we are hardly in a position to appeal to the police for protection. Our activities, though allowed officially, are hardly such as would appeal even to the English authorities. And on this occasion particularly that is the case. You may remember that the part I played in stirring up bloodshed at Cowdenheath, a few months ago, under the name of McFavish, caused me to be deported. So though our cause is legal—my presence in this country is not. Which was why tonight, it was particularly essential that we should not be disturbed. Not only are we up against this unknown gang of men, but I, in addition, am up against the police."

"Have you any information with regard to this gang?" It was the Jew who had closed the chink in the shutters speaking for the first time.

"None of any use—save that they are masked in black, and cloaked in long black cloaks." He paused a moment as if to collect his thoughts.

"They are all armed, and Petrovitch—who escaped from them—was very insistent on one point. It concerned the leader of the gang, who he affirmed was a man of the most gigantic physical strength; a giant powerful as two ordinary strong men. He said . . . Ah! Mein Gott!"

His voice rose in a scream as he cowered back, while the others, with terror in their faces, rose hurriedly and huddled together in the corners of the room.

In the doorway stood a huge man covered from head to foot in black. In each hand he held a revolver, with which he covered the eight occupants during the second or two which it took for half a dozen similarly disguised men to file past him and take up their positions round the walls.

And Waldeck, a little more educated than the remainder of his friends, found himself thinking of old tales of the Spanish inquisition and the doges of Venice even as he huddled a little nearer to the table.

"Stand by the table, all of you." It was the man at the door who was the master of the house, and like sheep they obeyed him—all save Flash Jim. For that worthy, crook though he was, was not without physical courage. The police he knew better than to play the fool with, but these were not the police.

"Wot the—" he snarled, and got no farther. Something hit him behind the head, a thousand stars danced before his eyes, and with a strangled grunt he crashed forward on his face.

For a moment or two there was silence, and then once again the man at the door spoke.

"Arrange the specimens in a row."

In a second the seven remaining men were marshaled in a line, behind them stood six motionless black figures. And then the big man walked slowly down in front of them, peering into each man's face. He spoke no word until he reached the end of the line, and then, his inspection concluded, he stepped back and leaned against the wall facing them.

"A naming collection," he remarked thoughtfully. "A loathsome brood. What are the three undersized and shivering insects on the right?"

"Those are three of my clerks," said Waldeck with an assumption of angry bravado. "And I would like to know."

"In good time you will," answered the deep voice. "Three of your clerks, are they; imbued with your rotten ideas, I suppose, and yearning to follow in father's footsteps? Have we anything particular against them?"

There was no answer from the masked men, and the leader made a sign. Instantly the three terrified clerks were seized from behind and brought up to him, where they stood trembling and shaking in every limb.

"Listen to me, you three little worms." With an effort they pulled themselves together; a ray of hope was dawning in their minds—perhaps they were going to be let off easy.

"My friends and I do not like you or

your type. You meet in secret places, and in your slimy minds you concoct schemes which, incredible though it may seem, have so far had more than a fair measure of success in this country. But your main idea is not the schemes, but the money you are paid to carry them out. This is your first and last warning. Another time you will be treated differently. Get out of here and see you don't stop."

The door was closed behind them and two of the masked men; there was a sound as of a boot being used with skill and strength, and cries of pain; then the door reopened and the mask men returned.

"Who are you?" muttered Zaboleff, his lips trembling.

"A specimen hunter," said the other suavely. "I am making a collection of people like you. The people of our country are unduly kind to your breed, although they would not have been kind tonight, Zaboleff, unless I had intervened. But I couldn't let them have you; you're such a very nice specimen. I don't think somehow that you've worked this little flying visit of yours very well. Of course I knew about it, but I must confess I was surprised when I found that the police did, too."

"What do you mean?" demanded the other hoarsely.

"I mean that when we arrived here we found to our surprise that the police had forestalled us. Popular house, this tonight."

"The police!" muttered Waldeck dazedly.

"Even so—led by no less a personage than Inspector McIver. They had completely surrounded the house, and necessitated a slight change in my plans."

"Where are they now?" cried Waldeck.

"Ah! Where indeed. Let us trust at any rate in comfort."

"By heaven!" said Zaboleff, taking a step forward. "As I asked you before—who are you?"

"And as I told you before, Zaboleff, a collector of specimens. Some I keep; some I let go—as you have already seen."

"And what are you going to do with me?"

"Keep you. Up to date you are the cream of my collection."

"Are you working with the police?" said the other dazedly.

"Until tonight we have not clashed. Even tonight, well, I think we are working toward the same end. And do you know what that end is, Zaboleff?"

The deep voice grew a little sterner. "It is the utter final overthrow of you and all that you stand for. To achieve this object we shall show no mercy. Even as you are working in the dark—so are we. Already you are frightened; already we have proved that you fear the unknown more than you fear the police; already the first few tricks?

And when we catch him you will cease to be the cream of my collection. This leader of yours—it was

that Petrovitch told him, I suppose, that made him send you over."

"I refuse to say," said the other.

"You needn't; it is obvious. And now that you are caught—he will come here himself. Perhaps not at once—but he will come. And then . . . But we waste time. The money, Zaboleff."

"I have no money," he snarled.

"You lie, Zaboleff. You lie clumsily. You have quite a lot of money brought over for Waldeck so that he might carry on the good work after you had sailed tomorrow. Quick, please; time passes."

With a curse Zaboleff produced a small canvas bag and held it out.

The other took it and glanced inside.

"I see," he said gravely. "Pearls and precious stones. Belonging once,

I suppose, to a murdered gentlewoman whose only crime was that she, through no action of her own, was born in a different sphere to

me."

(Continued on Page Six)

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W. P. Prophet

Resolved

—that the unpleasant things of 1925 be forgotten—that the pleasant ones only be remembered—that we start 1926 with sincere good wishes for all—and that we shall strive to be worthy of your good will and continued patronage.



Malcolm D. Clark