



The BLACK GANG

A Sequel to Bulldog Drummond.

BY CYRIL MCNEILE SAPPER
W.C. Service

BULLDOG DRUMMOND is back! The hero of the most exciting mystery story in many moons—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 capably humorous story of Bulldog Drummond's private war to a finish with Carl Peterson, the girl Irma and their mercenary 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 has been keeping the British public awake nights, with a series of exciting tales, mostly based upon the events of the last 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 live 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 dimly round a house standing by itself almost on the shores of Barking creek. The house seemed deserted. Every window was shuttered; the garden was unweeded 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 away dimly 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 falling 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 gossips 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-

dergrowth. "What do you think it was?"

"I thought I heard a bush creaking as if—as if some one was moving," he said, relaxing his grip. "It might have been the wind, I suppose."

He still peered fearfully into the gloomy garden, until the other man dragged him roughly toward the house.

"Of course it was the wind," he muttered angrily. "For heaven's sake, Zaboloff, don't get the jumps. If you will insist on coming to an infernal place like this to transact a little perfectly normal business you must expect a few strange noises and sounds. Let's get indoors; the others should be here by now. It oughtn't to take more than an hour, and you can be on board again before dawn."

The man who had been addressed as Zaboloff ceased looking over his shoulder, and followed the other through a broken-down lattice-gate to the rear of the house. They paused in front of the back door, and on it the leader knocked three times in a peculiar way. It was obviously a prearranged signal, for almost at once stealthy steps could be heard coming along the passage inside. The door was cautiously pulled back a few inches, and a man peered out, only to throw it open wide with a faint sigh of relief.

"It's you, Mr. Waldox, is it?" he muttered. "Glad you've got 'ere at last. This place is fair giving us all the 'ump."

"Evening, Jim." He stepped inside, followed by Zaboloff, and the door closed behind them. "Our friend's boat was a little late. Is everyone here?"

"Yep," answered the other. "All the six of us. And I reckons we'd like to get it over as soon as possible. Has he"—his voice sank to a hoarse undertone—"has he brought the money?"

"You'll all hear in good time," said Waldox curtly. "Which is the room?"

"Ere it is, guv'nor." Jim flung open a door. "And you'll 'ave to sit on the floor, as the chairs ain't safe." Two candles guttered on a square table in the center of the room, showing up the faces of five men who sat on the floor, leaning against the walls. Three of them were nondescript specimens of humanity of the type that may be seen by the thousand hurrying into the city by the early business trains. They were representatives of the poorer type of clerk. And yet to the close observer something more might be read in their faces; a greedy, hungry look, a shifty, untrustworthy look—the look of those who are jealous of everyone better placed than themselves, but who are incapable of trying to better their own positions except by the relative method of dragging back their more fortunate acquaintances; the look of little men dissatisfied not so much with their own littleness as with the bigness of other people.

The two others were Jews; a little flashily dressed, distinctly addicted to cheap jewelry. They were sitting apart from the other three, talking in low tones, but as the door opened their conversation ceased abruptly and they looked up at the newcomers with the keen, searching look of their race. Waldox they hardly glanced at; it was the stranger, Zaboloff, who riveted their attention. They took in every detail of the shrewd foreign face—the olive skin, the dark, piercing eyes, the fine-pointed beard; they measured him up as a boxer measures up his opponent, as a business man takes stock of the second party in a deal; then once again they conversed together in low tones which were barely above a whisper.

It was Jim who broke the silence. Flash Jim, to give him the full name to which he answered in the haunts he frequented.

"Wot shah't getting on with it, guv'nor?" he remarked with an attempt at a genial smile. "This 'ere 'ouse ain't wot I'd choose for a bloomin' 'omeymoon."

With an abrupt gesture Waldox silenced him and advanced to the table.

"This is Mr. Zaboloff, gentlemen," he said quietly. "We are a little late, I am afraid, but it was unavoidable. He will explain to you why you were asked to come here, and not meet at our usual rendezvous in Soho."

He stepped back a couple of paces and Zaboloff took his place. For a moment or two he glanced around at the faces turned expectantly toward him; then resting his two hands on the table in front of him, he leaned toward them.

"Gentlemen," he began, and the foreign accent seemed a little more pronounced. "I have asked you to come here tonight through my good friend, Mr. Waldox, because it has come to our ears—no matter how—that London is no longer a safe meeting place. Two or three things have occurred lately the significance of which it is impossible to disregard. Our chief, with whom I spent last evening, is seriously concerned about these things."

"You spent last night with the chief?" said Waldox, and his voice

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 chink in the shutter there?"

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

"Nevertheless, kindly cover it up," ordered Zaboloff, and one of the Jews rose 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 Waldox furiously. "Anyone would think you wanted a nurse."

"Gentlemen—please." Zaboloff 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. Waldox 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 Zaboloff quietly, and Flash Jim breathed a sigh of relief. "It is easy to keep within the law, but if our information 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 ourselves, 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 McTavish, 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! My God!'"

His voice rose in a scream as he covered his face, 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 Waldox, 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 spoke in a curiously deep voice, 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, while 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 nauseating collection," he remarked thoughtfully. "A loathsome brood. What are the three oversized and shivering insects on the right?"

"Those are three of my clerks," said Waldox 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.

"They have gone," announced one of them. "We helped them on their way."

"Good," said the leader. "Let us continue the inspection. What are these two?"

A man from behind stepped forward and examined them slowly; then he came up to the leader and whispered in his ear.

"Is that so?" A new and terrible note had crept into the deep voice.

"My friends and I do not like your trade, you swine. It is well that we have come provided with the necessary implement for such a case. Fetch the cat."

In silence one of the men left the room, and as his full meaning came home to the two Jews they flung themselves groveling on the floor, screaming for mercy.

"Gag them."

The order came out sharp and clear, and in an instant the two writhing men were seized and gagged. Only their rolling eyes and trembling hands showed the terror they felt as they dragged themselves on their knees towards the impassive leader.

"The cat for cases of this sort is used legally," he remarked. "We merely anticipate the law."

With a fresh outburst of moans the two watched the door open, and the inexorable black figure come in holding in his hand a short stick from which nine lashes hung down.

"Heavens!" gasped Waldox, start-

ing forward. "What are you going to do?"

"Flog them to within an inch of their lives," said the deep voice. "It is the punishment for their method of livelihood. Five and six—take charge. After you have finished remove them in Number Three car, and drop them in London."

Struggling impotently they were led away, and the leader passed on to the remaining two men.

"So, Zaboloff, you came after all. Likewise, surely, in view of the police?"

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

"A specimen hunter," said the other suavely. "I am making a collection of people like you. The police of our country are unduly kind to your breed, although they would not have been kind tonight, Zaboloff, 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 Waldox dazedly.

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

"Where are they now?" cried Waldox.

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

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

"And as I told you before, Zaboloff, 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, Zaboloff?" 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 are ours. But you still hold the ace, Zaboloff—or shall we say the king of trumps? And when we catch him you will cease to be the cream of my collection. This leader of yours—it was what 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, Zaboloff."

"I have no money," he snarled.

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

With a curse Zaboloff 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 gentleman whose only crime was that she, through no action of her own, was born in a different sphere to

(Continued on Page Six)

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A. & L. Peaches, 2 1/2-lb. cans,	3 for 85c
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\$6.00 Winter Unionsuits	Now \$5.25
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\$5.00 Winter Unionsuits	Now \$4.25

W. P. Prophet

Happy New Year folks!

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