

THE BOYS FRIEND 1st

"THE MISSING RACEHORSE!" THRILLING NEW STORY OF "BULLDOG"
HOLDFAST. COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

The BOYS' FRIEND

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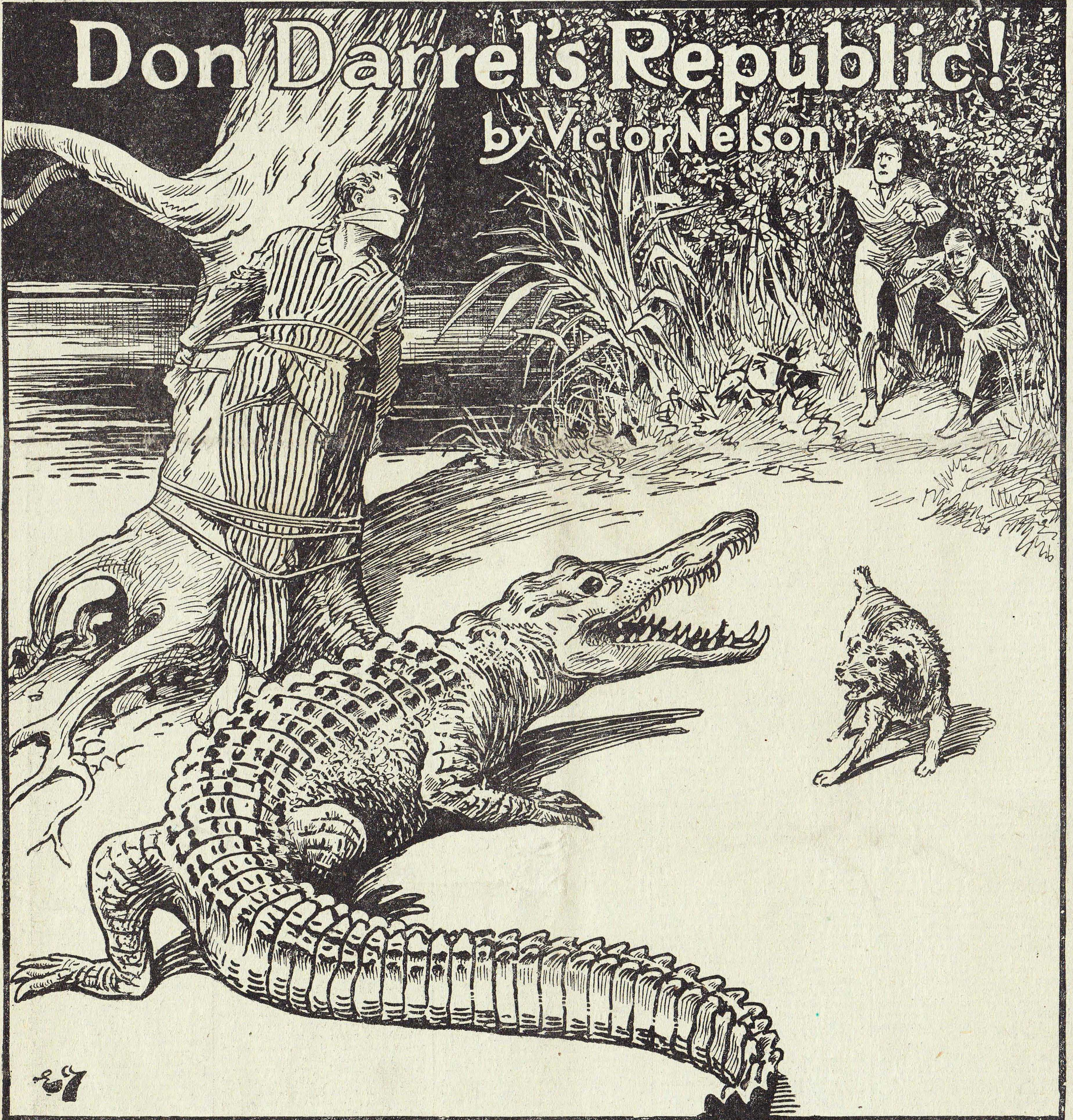
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27 YEARS OLD—AND STILL THE BEST!

[Week Ending April 8th, 1922.]



Don Darrel's Republic!

by Victor Nelson

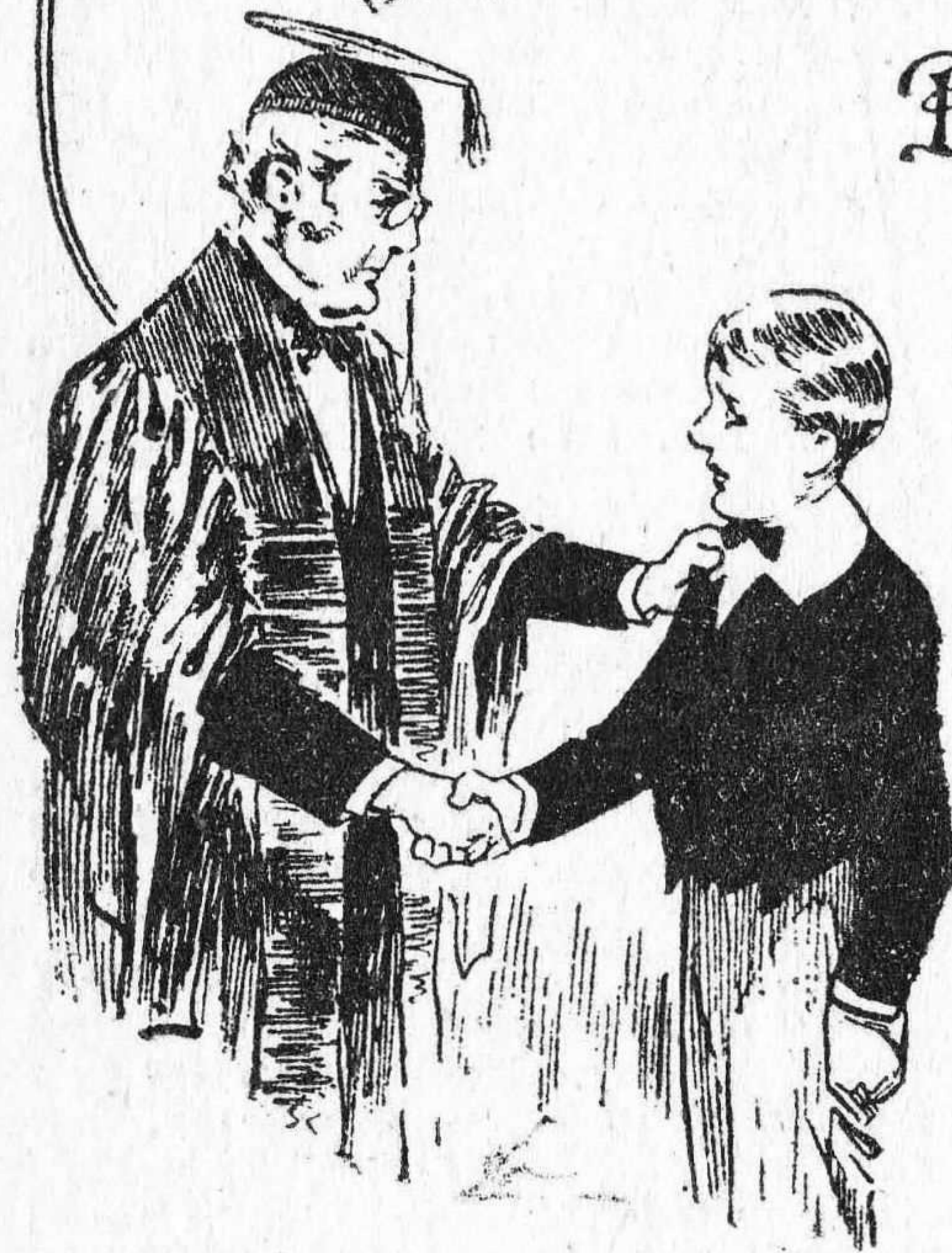
A LAST-MINUTE RESCUE!

The great alligator turned towards the barking terrier and opened its huge jaws! Chuta's rifle came swiftly to his shoulder, and he prepared to fire. It was a tense moment! If the bullet missed its target a horrible death would await the captive Boy with Fifty Millions!

A SPLENDID COMPLETE STORY OF JIMMY SILVER & CO.

Truth Will Out!

By Owen Conquest



The 1st Chapter.

The Chopper Comes Down!

"Erroll!"
"Yes, sir!"
"You will go to the Head's study before lessons!"

The Fourth Form at Rookwood were settling into their places in the Form-room when Mr. Dalton called to Kit Erroll.

There was a slight buzz among the juniors.

Every eye in the Form was turned on Erroll. Instead of taking his place, Erroll moved to the door again.

Erroll made his way slowly to the Head's study. He was not looking forward to the interview, but he was cool and composed, as he generally was, and he tapped at the Head's door and entered without a tremor.

Dr. Chisholm was standing by his table, with a dark brow. His eyes glinted as they were fixed on Erroll. "You sent for me, sir!" said the Fourth-Former.

"Yes. You will be leaving Rookwood to-day, Erroll."

The junior drew a deep breath. "Leaving Rookwood, sir?"

"Precisely! I warned you of what you had to expect, Erroll, if you persisted in your outrageous conduct, and you have persisted in it. You are expelled from the school, sir!" said the Head, in a voice like the rumble of distant thunder.

"May I ask—"

"You are perfectly well aware of your offence, Erroll. I shall explain the matter fully to your father. You have been the leader in a most extraordinary and outrageous persecution of Mr. Lucian Durie, a gentleman who is now a guest under my roof. You have made wild and foolish accusations against him—"

"I recognised Mr. Durie, sir, as a man who was called Slippery Smith—a man who has been in prison—"

"Silence!" thundered the Head.

"I must speak, sir, if I am to be sent away from the school for what I have done," said Erroll steadily.

"You are deceived in that man, and I felt it my duty to warn you."

"I have known Mr. Durie since he was a boy. He is the son of an old Oxford friend of mine," said the Head.

"I know, sir. But you do not know that he has led a double life, and that he has associated with criminals."

"Nonsense!"

"I know him, sir. I am certain of what I say. Besides, he has admitted it in my presence, and in that of Mornington and Silver."

"Nonsense, I say!"

"The other day, sir, he made a murderous attack on me in the wood, and if Silver and Morny had not come to my help—"

"I will not allow you to make these statements, Erroll," said the Head in a grinding voice. "I have heard from Inspector Sharpe, of Rookham, this morning, by telephone. I warned you of what would happen if you repeated your wicked slanders outside the school. Now it appears that you have called upon Inspector Sharpe, and made your statement regarding Mr. Durie to him."

"I have, sir," said Erroll. "I was bound to report the man to the police, sir, as I know that he is here to rob you."

"To—to rob me!" ejaculated the Head.

"That can be his only object, sir," said Erroll. "He knows that Mr. Sharpe has been told. He knows that the inspector will have communicated with Scotland Yard before this, and will have learned all about him. The inspector will be here to-day, some time, and if Mr. Durie is still here he will be arrested."

"Erroll!" gasped the Head. "Yet he has remained, sir," said Erroll. "He is still here this morning, though he must know that the blow may fall at any time. That can only mean that he has not yet carried out his purpose, but still hopes to do so."

"I will not argue the matter with you, Erroll. I warned you that if you repeated this slander I should expel you from the school. You have done so. You will not return to your Form-room, Erroll. You will pack your box this morning, and you will be sent away from the school by the 12.50 train, in charge of a prefect."

"Very well, sir!" Erroll turned to the door, but he turned back. "May I speak one word, sir? It was for forgery that Smith—Mr. Durie—was sent to prison. He—"

"Silence! Go!"
In his anger the Head made a stride towards the junior. Erroll quitted the study without another word. It was obviously futile to

And he quitted the study, leaving Lucian Durie ensconced by the blazing fire, with the newspaper in his hand. But Lucian Durie did not read the "Times" that morning!

The 2nd Chapter.

The Watcher!

Jimmy Silver & Co. glanced at the Form-room door a good many times that morning, expecting to see Erroll return to the class. But he did not return. Morning lessons proceeded without him.

Erroll had gone to the dormitory; but he did not pack his box as the Head had commanded him.

He was sentenced to expulsion, and he was to leave at midday. But he was not disturbed.

He could make allowances, too, for the Head's anger. Dr. Chisholm was utterly in ignorance of the double life led by the man who, with every chance to succeed, had gone hopelessly to the bad, and had become the associate of criminals.

He believed that Lucian Durie had been abroad at the time when that gentleman, under the name of Slippery Smith, had been a tenant of one of his Majesty's prisons. He was not likely to believe, without absolute proof, that his old friend's son was a

Erroll started up at last.

Everybody was now in the Form-rooms—the Head was busy with the Sixth and Greek. The coast was clear for the rascal to make an attempt to carry out his purpose. At night the study door was locked, and the key removed. It would not have been easy for him to make the attempt then without giving the alarm. But now—

Now it would be scarcely safe—the Head might return to his study. But the man was desperate now, and he would take chances. If he left Rookwood with a cheque from the Head's book in his possession, he had only to fill it in—an easy task to the accomplished forger—and call at the bank at Rookham as he fled. He would make the cheque for as large an amount as would look plausible, and excite no suspicion at the bank; and he would disappear with that sum in his possession. As if he could read the rascal's thoughts, Erroll saw his game.

He descended from the dormitory, as soon as he was sure that the Head would be in the Sixth Form room. Downstairs he came on Tupper, the page. He beckoned to Tupper.

"Have you seen Mr. Durie?" he asked.

Tupper grinned. Erroll had made no secret of his knowledge regarding Slippery Smith, and the previous evening it had been the talk of the Lower School. Something of it had evidently reached Tupper's ears, to judge by his grinning face.

"Yessir," said Tupper.

"I—I want to see him. Do you know where he is now?"

"Ead's study, sir!"

Erroll compressed his lips.

"Are you sure, Tupper?"

"Yessir—saw 'im," said Tupper.

"I went into the study to dust, sir, and he was reading the 'Times' afore the fire, sir, and he told me not to disturb him, sir."

robbed the Head with impunity—the loss of the cheque would not have been found out till long after the guest had left Rookwood, and there would have been nothing to connect him with it.

Durie replaced the cheque-book and closed the desk. Then he sat at the Head's writing-table, pen in hand.

The rest of his task did not take the accomplished forger long.

A little later Erroll saw him leave the study.

The junior slipped from the tree and moved away. Ten minutes later Mr. Lucian Durie came out of the School House, with his hat and coat on and a bag in his hand.

He crossed to the gates, and, catching sight of Erroll in the quadrangle, he paused.

"So you are not at lessons, my boy," he said.

"As you see," answered Erroll.

Durie smiled.

"I understand that you are to be kicked out of Rookwood!" he remarked.

"Unless my accusation against you proves correct!" said Erroll dryly.

He kept a safe distance from the rogue as he spoke. He had not forgotten the murderous attack in Coombe Woods of the previous day.

"You need not fear, my boy," said Lucian Durie smoothly.

"In a safer spot, Kit Erroll, I would twist your neck for what you have done, as I think you know pretty well. But I do not want to provide Mr. Sharpe with a case of murder to distinguish himself in. But look out for yourself, my boy! I shall not forget!"

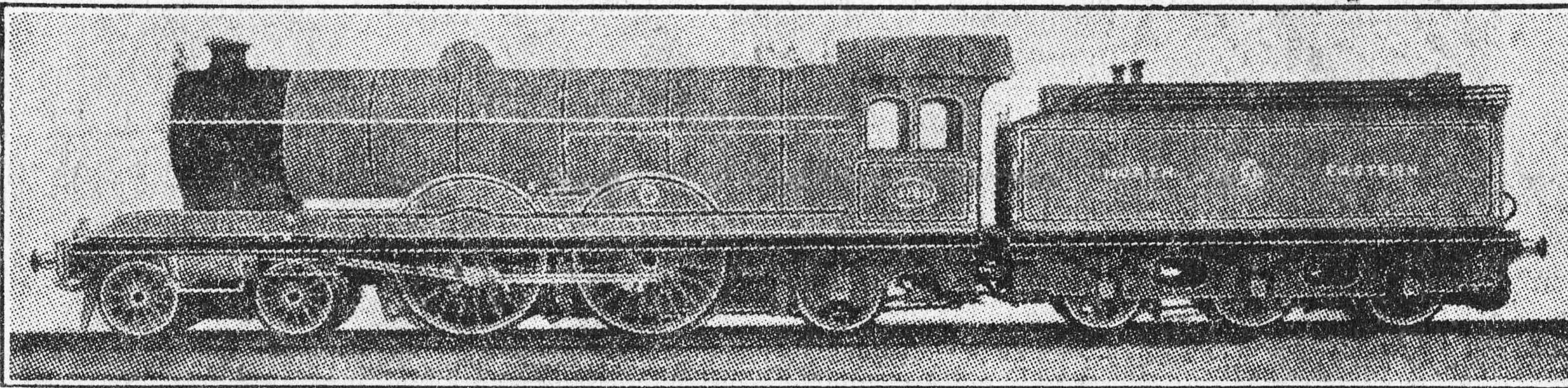
"I'm not afraid of you!" said Erroll contemptuously.

Slippery Smith's eyes glittered.

"You've blown the gaff on me!"

he said in a low, menacing tone. "Up to now, whenever the trail of Slippery Smith was too hot, I have

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attempt to warn the Head in his present mood.

For several minutes after the junior had gone the Head of Rookwood fumed in his study. There was a tap at the door, and a young man looked in with a smiling face.

The Head's brow cleared. He nodded with a cordial smile to Lucian Durie.

"Come in, my dear fellow."

"I am sorry, sir, that my visit seems to have brought a good deal of worry upon you," remarked Durie.

"It is I who should apologise," said the Head. "The boy Erroll is expelled from the school for his slanderous statements, Durie. That is the least I can do."

"I must agree that he merits it, sir, though I am sorry—"

"You need waste no compassion on him, Durie," said the Head. "I have never experienced such obstinacy and malice as this boy has exhibited. He is under a delusion, of course. He fancies that he recognises in you a criminal called Slippery Smith, with whom he came in contact when he was in bad hands, before he came to Rookwood. He persists in this, with unexampled obstinacy, and has had the audacity to make a statement to the police at Rookham."

Lucian Durie smiled.

"I was aware of it," he assented. "He cannot even see that your remaining here is a proof that he is mistaken," said the Head. "I am more sorry than I can say, Durie, that this has happened. It is indeed infamous that a guest of mine should be exposed to such insults."

He glanced at the clock. "I am late for the Sixth already. I must leave you now."

"I think, sir, that I will call on Inspector Sharpe this morning and go into the matter with him," said Durie. "But do not let me detain you. If I may sit by your excellent fire, and look at your 'Times' for half an hour, before I go over to Rookham—"

"My dear fellow, make yourself comfortable," said the Head.

rascal of the first water, and was at Rookwood to rob him. Erroll's unsupported statement was not likely to influence him. It was much easier to believe that the boy had made a mistake, and that he persisted in his mistake from malicious obstinacy.

But Erroll knew that there was no mistake.

He sat on his bed in the dormitory and thought the matter out. Lucian Durie knew that the game was up; that the inspector's visit to the school meant arrest for him, or at least exposure. His double game could no longer be played. Owing to Erroll, it was now to become clear that Lucian Durie and Slippery Smith were one and the same man. The Head would know the truth; his trust and confidence would change to horror.

Whether there was a charge now pending against Slippery Smith, since he had served his last sentence, Erroll did not know. But he felt certain that when exposure came, and the rascal was cast off, he would not leave Rookwood empty-handed. In all probability he had come to the school to rob the Head, though but for Erroll he might have done so without discovery. Now that discovery was certain, it was all the more sure that he would lay hands on what he could before he went.

Why had he stayed on, risking a meeting with Mr. Sharpe? He had an object in view. That object could only be to fill his pockets before he went. But how? He was a professional forger—he was no cracksmen—the Head's safe was secure from him. If he had a design, it was upon Dr. Chisholm's cheque-book.

Erroll remembered how he had come on the man bending over the desk in the Head's study, a few days before. Erroll knew that the cheque-book was kept in that desk; and no doubt Durie had learned as much by this time.

Erroll spotted him the next minute.

He was leaning over the Head's desk, and the lid of the desk was open. The lock had evidently been snapped.

Durie was fumbling in the contents of the desk. He drew out an oblong book, and laid it on the desk and turned the leaves. It was a cheque-book, as Erroll knew from the shape. From the cheque-book the man detached a single leaf. Erroll noted that he detached it from the end of the book. He knew the reason. Dr. Chisholm was not likely to count the cheques remaining in the book; he would not discover the loss till he came to the place where the leaf was missing. That might be some weeks ahead.

Erroll smiled grimly.

This, evidently, had been the rascal's scheme from the first. If the discovery of his true identity had never been made he would have

"Thank you, Tupper."

Tupper went on his way to the regions below, and Erroll went out into the quadrangle.

His suspicions, or rather his certainty, was confirmed. Lucian Durie, alias Slippery Smith, was in the Head's study—alone! Erroll did not intend to go to the room. But he intended to know what Durie was doing—though he could guess. At a little distance from the Head's window stood one of the famous old Rookwood beeches, and in a few minutes Erroll was on the farther side of the massive trunk. A few minutes more, and he was in the branches.

Keeping in cover in the tree, he looked fixedly towards the study window. From that altitude he could see easily into the room.

Certainly Mr. Lucian Durie had no suspicion of being watched from the side of the quadrangle. The study door was closed—and locked. Erroll saw the brightly burning fire, and an empty armchair near it, with a newspaper lying in the chair. Evidently Mr. Durie was not reading the "Times" as Tupper had supposed.

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always found it safe to become Lucian Durie again for a while. That is finished after to-day. Whenever Slippery Smith is wanted, the police will look for Lucian Durie. I owe that to you, my boy! I shall remember. I am going now, but you will see me again some day."

"In the dock, I hope," said Erroll.

Durie made a stride towards him. But he stopped. Old Mack, the porter, was lounging outside his lodge, glancing towards them. And there were hundreds of Rookwood fellows within sound of a shout. It was "not good enough"; and Slippery Smith controlled his rage.

"I shall remember!" he muttered again.

And, turning his back on Erroll, he walked down to the gates and disappeared.

Erroll watched him go.

The 3rd Chapter. Erroll Takes a Hand!

In the Form-rooms masters and boys were busy with the tasks of the morning. In all the great building of Rookwood only Kit Erroll of the Fourth was idle. He wandered about the silent, deserted quadrangle for some time, thinking.

Slippery Smith was gone—with the forged cheque in his pocket. Erroll thought of going to the Sixth Form room to tell the Head what he had seen. But he realised that it would be useless. Even if Dr. Chisholm consented to open his desk and examine his cheque-book, that would not convince him that Lucian Durie had robbed him and was gone from Rookwood—never to return. It was more probable that he would refuse to make the examination on Erroll's word—that he would not listen to a statement at all. It was even possible that he might suspect Erroll of having purloined the cheque himself in order to give colour to his accusation.

True, the truth would soon be known. But, in the meantime, the rascal was escaping with ample time to cash the forged cheque at the

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Rookham bank. The cheque would be an open one, and the bank officials would see nothing in the signature to excite suspicion—the forger was too skilled for that! The money would be paid out over the counter, and Slippery Smith would take the train to London with his plunder in his pocket.

And even if the cunning rascal was arrested later, it was pretty certain that the plunder would never be recovered. Erroll thought the matter out with a wrinkled brow, while Jimmy Silver & Co. were grinding Latin in the Form-room.

He made up his mind at last, and he proceeded to Mr. Dalton's study. There was a telephone there, and Mr. Dalton was busy with his Form. Erroll went into the study, and rang up the exchange.

"Rookham two-one-two!"

He was soon through. "Is that Rookham branch, City and County Bank?"

"Yes."

"I wish to speak to the manager."

"Manager speaking."

"Dr. Chisholm has his account with you?"

"Yes."

"A man will call this morning with a cheque—an open cheque—signed with Dr. Chisholm's name. It will be a forgery."

"Wha-a-at!"

"The amount will probably be a large one," said Erroll—"as large as the man could make it with safety. I have seen the man take the cheque and fill it in, and I am warning you. If a man calls to-day with an open cheque, purporting to be signed by Dr. Chisholm, the loss will be yours if you pay out the money."

"Upon my word! Who is speaking?"

"A Rookwood boy—Erroll."

"Ask Dr. Chisholm to come to the telephone, please!"

"The Head does not know, and he would not believe me. I am warning you on my own responsibility. But I can refer you to Inspector Sharpe. I am just going to ring him up, too."

"Well!"

Erroll heard that astonished ejaculation from the bank manager before he rang off.

He lost no time in ringing up Inspector Sharpe at the Rookham Police Station. The inspector's deep voice came through.

"Erroll speaking," said the junior quietly. "I saw you the other evening, Mr. Sharpe, you remember?"

"Yes, my boy! Anything fresh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go ahead!" said the inspector. "I am coming over to the school in an hour's time to see Dr. Chisholm. Is Durie still there?"

"He left half an hour ago."

"Oh!"

"He has taken a cheque from the Head's book and filled it in."

"Gad!" ejaculated the inspector. "How do you know?"

"I was watching him."

"Good!"

"I think—in fact, I am sure—that he is gone for good, and that he is going to call at the bank in passing," said Erroll. "The cheque would be of no use to him after to-day. Of course, the Head will warn the bankers when he knows the truth."

"That's so."

"He will reach Rookham if he goes by train very soon now," said Erroll. "I have already warned the bank. I leave the rest to you, Mr. Sharpe."

"Hum!"

"You have learned something about him by this time, Mr. Sharpe?" asked Erroll anxiously.

"I have had a description of Slippery Smith from London and it fits with your description of Mr. Durie," said the inspector. "There has not been time yet for the photograph to arrive. It looks as if the man is losing no time. But as yet—"

"You will not allow him to escape!" panted Erroll.

"My dear boy, there is no definite charge against the man yet. His identity is not established. Your accusation is—ahem!—rather more than counter-balanced by Dr. Chisholm's support of the man. I am going into the matter thoroughly. But there is nothing so far to warrant taking so extreme a step as arresting him."

Erroll's heart sank.

"Then he will escape with his plunder!" he said bitterly.

There was a faint chuckle over the wires.

"Not at all, my boy! When Mr. Durie presents himself at the bank, he will find me there. I shall request him to accompany me to Rookwood School in order to refer the matter of the cheque to Dr. Chisholm. If that cheque is forged, as you say, that will settle the matter beyond

the shadow of a doubt. If it proves that you are mistaken, the consequences to you will be serious!"

"I shall be glad to take the risk," said Erroll. "There is no risk. I saw him steal the cheque. So long as he does not escape, I am satisfied."

"Rest assured of that. He will not escape. I shall go to the bank at once!"

"Oh, good!"

Erroll put up the receiver. He left Mr. Dalton's study with a lighter heart. He had done all that he could, and he believed that it would be effective. At all events, he could do no more.

He was in the quadrangle when the Rookwooders were dismissed from classes. Jimmy Silver & Co. came out in a crowd, and Erroll was surrounded at once. Jimmy Silver and Mornington, Lovell and Raby and Newcome, and a crowd of other fellows, all wanted to know what had happened.

Erroll told them composedly enough. The news would soon be common property at Rookwood, and there was no reason for concealment.

"Sacked!" said Mornington, with a whistle.

"You're taking it pretty coolly, if you're to be hiked off to the station in an hour's time!" said Lovell.

glitter in his eyes like that in the eyes of a hunted animal. His glance fell upon Kit Erroll among the crowd of schoolboys, and it seemed to burn. The car rolled on up the drive, with a crowd of Rookwooders behind it. It stopped, and the Rookham inspector alighted. Lucian Durie followed him out, and cast a glance about him. He was not a prisoner—yet. But it was obvious, from the inspector's manner, that he did not intend to give the man a chance of escape, though he was not a prisoner. The burly police official was quite ready to deal with Mr. Slippery Smith if that gentleman "gave himself away" by an attempt to cut and run.

But the rascal evidently knew that the attempt would be hopeless. He went into the house quietly with the inspector. And as they were shown into the Head's study a buzzing crowd filled the wide corridor. It was the biggest excitement that had ever happened at the old school!

The 4th Chapter.

The Last of Slippery Smith!

Dr. Chisholm raised his eyebrows as Lucian Durie entered his study, followed immediately by the burly inspector from Rookham. He was

iron. He made a slight movement to bring him closer to the silent Durie. The man was a prisoner now; and the Head's statement had condemned him!"

"I was warned, sir," said Mr. Sharpe. "Erroll—keen lad that, sir—telephoned to me this morning to catch the man at the bank."

"He had the audacity—the insolence—"

"You may thank him, sir, for preventing a robbery," said the inspector dryly. "The loss, I suppose, would have fallen upon the bank, but in the circumstances it would have been up to you to make it good, I think. Tell me, sir, whether you signed that cheque?"

Inspector Sharpe laid a cheque on the Head's table.

The old gentleman's eyes almost started from his head as he looked at it. It was a cheque bearing his own signature, drawn in favour of Lucian Durie for the sum of five hundred pounds.

"The sum is large, sir," said Mr. Sharpe. "But as the bank people had seen Mr. Durie in your company—it seems that he called at the bank with you one day—they would have had no suspicion, and the money certainly would have been handed over, if they had not been warned."

"Bless my soul!"

There was a faint clink of metal as Mr. Sharpe drew something from his pocket that the Head shuddered to see.

"Wrists!" said the inspector laconically.

"Oh, Heaven!" whispered the Head.

Click!

Dr. Chisholm covered his face with his hands.

He could not doubt now. Yet he clung to a straw of hope. He dropped his hands, and his eyes were fixed on Durie's white face.

"Durie—Lucian," he muttered, "why do you not speak? Cannot you—"

—you say something—explain? The son of my old friend. Was the boy speaking the truth all the time? I have punished him—severely. Was he only trying to save me from—from this? Speak!"

Durie hung his head.

"You confess?" whispered the Head.

"My dear sir," said the inspector gruffly, "surely you do not doubt the evidence of your eyes! What use would it be to the man to lie now?"

"Tell me the truth, Lucian!"

Durie breathed hard.

"Pardon me," he muttered. "I—I was tempted! I—I—"

"Then it is true!"

"Have pity on me!" breathed the man. "If you fail me I am lost! My father was your friend—"

Dr. Chisholm rose to his feet. His agitation had passed now. He knew the truth. And pain and distress had given place to righteous anger. He was pale, but his eyes blazed at the shrinking wretch before him.

"You were tempted?" he said.

"Bah! Do you think you can deceive me now? The boy was speaking the truth. You have led a double life—"

Lucian Durie, to your father's old friends, Slippery Smith among the criminals with whom you have associated. Heavens! But for Erroll—the boy I have punished and wronged—but for him you would have robbed me and never been discovered. Your guilt might have fallen upon the innocent. Say no more! For an habitual criminal I have no word to say. He is your prisoner, Inspector Sharpe! Take him away, and rely upon me to take every step to help justice to be done!"

Lucian Durie bit his white lips. His last hope had been faint, and it had failed him. The inspector's strong grasp closed on his arm.

"Come!"

The rascal burst into a bitter laugh. As if a cloak had fallen from him, Lucian Durie disappeared, and it was Slippery Smith, the forger, thief, and reckless rascal, who stood in his place. He laughed.

"The game's up here," he said flippantly. "After all, I fairly earned the five hundred, old boy. You've bored me unconsciously while I've been here. Pulling your leg was easy enough, but it was a deuce of a bore. And you asked for it, Chisholm; for of all the hot-headed old fools—"

The inspector's muscular grasp jerked the rascal out of the room before he could get further.

"That will do!" said Inspector Sharpe.

Dr. Chisholm sank into his chair again with a crimson face. Inspector Sharpe marched his prisoner back to the car. There was a buzz from the crowd of Rookwooders as they saw Lucian Durie in handcuffs.

"The merry bird's caged!" remarked Mornington.

With a very satisfied face, Inspector Sharpe whirled away in the car with his prisoner Slippery Smith was in safe keeping at last!

"Erroll!" The Head's voice was low. "I am sorry, my boy! I wronged you. I could not believe—"

"It is nothing, sir," said Erroll quietly. "I am only glad that you believe me now, sir."

"You have done me a great service," said the Head. "Your sentence is, of course, rescinded. I am only sorry that it was ever passed. You are a noble lad, Erroll. You have done your duty under great difficulties. I thank you, my boy!"

And the Head of Rookwood shook hands with Kit Erroll.

Kit Erroll was the hero of the hour at Rookwood. In a cell at Rookham Police Station Slippery Smith muttered his name with curses. But Erroll gave no thought to the rascal who had been lagged at last!

THE END.

("The Amazing New Boy!" is the long, complete tale of the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND. In the meantime, a story of Jimmy Silver's early schooldays appears in the "Popular." Out on Tuesday!)



THE FORGER AT WORK! From his perch in the beech tree the Rookwood junior could see into the Head's study. Sitting at Dr. Chisholm's desk was Lucian Durie at work on the stolen cheque!

Erroll laughed.

"I don't think that will happen," he said. "Inspector Sharpe may be here any minute now."

"And you're sure you're right?" said Lovell.

"Quite!"

"There's no doubt about that," said Jimmy Silver. "But, my hat, what a surprise for the Head!"

"Bulkeley wants you, Erroll!" called out Tubby Muffin.

Bulkeley of the Sixth came towards the crowd of Fourth-Formers. His face was very grave.

"Is your box packed, Erroll?" he asked.

"No, Bulkeley."

"Get it done at once, then. The Head has instructed me to take you to the station for the twelve-thirty train," said the captain of Rookwood.

"I sha'n't be going!" said Erroll.

"Eh?"

"The Head will change his mind before twelve-thirty."

"Nonsense! Be ready at twelve-fifteen," said Bulkeley; and he walked away.

Erroll shrugged his shoulders.

The excitement in the Fourth Form was intense by this time. Jimmy Silver & Co. crowded round the gates, watching for the arrival of the inspector. Tubby Muffin was the first to sight a car upon the road, and he gave an excited squeak:

"Here he comes!"

It was barely twelve o'clock. A swarm of Rookwooders watched the car turn in at the gates.

far from suspecting the real state of affairs—as yet.

"Good-morning, Mr. Sharpe!" said the Head politely. "Pray be seated. I have been expecting you. Mr. Durie called upon you, I think, with regard to the preposterous charge made against him by a boy of this school—a boy who has been expelled for his audacity—"

"Mr. Durie did not call upon me, sir," said Mr. Sharpe.

"I understood that that was his object. He has, at least, returned with you," said the Head. "I hope that the matter is now quite satisfactorily settled?"

"Not quite, sir," said the inspector.

Durie did not speak. His face was paler than before, but he was still cool. He had not given up hope.

"Then what—?" said the Head.

"I met Mr. Durie at the Rookham branch of the City and County Bank," said the inspector. "I requested him to accompany me here, in order to clear up the matter, sir."

"Ah, that was quite a good idea! I can answer for Mr. Durie in every possible way," said the Head. "I knew him when he was a boy, and his father was my old friend at Oxford."

"Then you gave him the cheque, sir?"

"The—the cheque! What cheque?"

"Mr. Durie's business at the bank, sir, was to cash a cheque for five hundred pounds, drawn in his favour by you."

The Head fairly jumped.

"Are you dreaming, Mr. Sharpe?" he said unpleasantly. "What absurd mistake is this? I have drawn no cheque in favour of Mr. Durie."

The inspector's rugged face set like

"Did you sign that cheque, sir?"

"I—I— Certainly not!"

"Then your signature has been most skilfully forged, Dr. Chisholm; and I do not think we need look much further for Slippery Smith, whose reputation in that line is pretty well known," said the Rookham inspector grimly.

"Good heavens!"

"The boy Erroll states that he watched this man take your cheque-book from your desk, steal a cheque, and fill it in."

"Impossible!"

"Examine your cheque-book, sir. You will see by the number where a cheque is missing."

With an almost staggering step the Head moved to his desk.

"The—the lock appears to be broken!" he said, in an almost inaudible voice.

"No doubt," said the inspector dryly.

With a trembling hand Dr. Chisholm took out his cheque-book. He turned the leaves till he came to a missing number.

"A—a cheque has been detached here," he faltered. "Between 00666 and 00668 one is missing!"

"This cheque bears the number 00667."

The Head of Rookwood sank helplessly into his chair. His agitation was painful to witness. He looked at Durie, and that wretched man kept his eyes on the carpet. He was not thinking of the Head's distress. He was thinking of his own only faint chance of escape—the chance that the Head would not prosecute the son of an old friend. That was all that Mr. Slippery Smith had to cling to now, and it was a slender thread.