HAVE YOU MET THE KID? A chance of a desperate adventure, and an opportunity of replenishing his empty coffers, are offered to the Rio Kid. Does the Kid take them? You bet he does!

THE RIO KID!

by Ralph Redway

This Week:
"THE KID'S VENTURE!"

A ROARING TALE OF ADVENTURE IN SOUTHERN TEXAS, FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Kid Chips In!

THE proclamation had been read, or taken as read, and for the hundredth or the thousandth time bare-legged patriots had turned out to fight enthusiastically in the sacred cause of liberty and loot.

Mexico was in the throes of one more revolution, and the tide of conflict swept along the southern shore of the Rio Grande—spent bullets dropped like hailstones on the Texan side of the river. The Rio Kid, camped on a grassy bluff that overlooked the border stream, found a cynical amusement in watching the scene that unrolled before his eyes.

The fighting had been going on all day. From early morning, when the Kid had broken camp, till the hot noontide when he camped on the bluff by the river, he had heard the roll of firing. Now he could see all that was to be seen, and he sat idly with his back propped against a cottonwood trunk, while his mustang lay at ease in the thick grass, and watched. Smoke blurred the clear sky from the incessant firing; wild horsemen charged and charged again. Often their fierce yelling reached the ears of the Kid, borne on the wind. The battle was great, but the casualties were not in proportion; it was the semi-pantomimic warfare of the Latin race, not the stern death-grip of the Anglo-Saxon.

Such as it was, the Government troops

seemed to be getting the upper hand—the Kid judged that they were the Government troops, because a few were in tattered uniforms, and the rest a trifle less ragged than their opponents. The firing slackened as the hot afternoon wore on, the conflict drifted away from the river; wounded men, sprawling in the grass, were being despatched by thrusts of rusty bayonets. The rebels were in retreat. The Kid yawned. The show was nearly over, and he began to think of saddling his mustang and riding. Then his attention became fixed on a little scene that was being enacted by the gleaming river that rolled between him and Mexico.

A little bunch of fugitives had rushed down to the river, with the evident intention of escaping across the Rio Grande into Texas. Across the border they could not be pursued, and only the river lay between them and safety. Five or six of them rushed into the shallow water, which was spattered by bullets round them; but only two reached the middle of the stream. The Kid, his attention arrested, watched them with interest. For men escaping from death he could not help feeling some sympathy, and he was tempted to intervene.

A horseman—an officer of rank by his gaudy uniform—had dashed into the stream after them, his bare sabre glittering in the sun. The two remaining fugitives plunged and scrambled on desperately to reach the Texan side, but the Mexican capitano was close behind on his powerful horse.

The Rio Kid's hand dropped on his gun. But he shook his head. He had no call to chip into a shindy on the other side of the border—for both parties, loyalists and patriots, he had the same profound contempt. For hundreds of miles the richest soil in the world lay uncultivated, while the hands that should have laboured there were engaged in imbecile warfare. His hand was on his gun, but he did not draw it—only he rose to his feet under the big cottonwood, and stood watching.

Dripping, panting, smeared with mud, the two Mexican rebels staggered from the water and reeled into the thick grass on the safe side.

The Kid was relieved. He was glad to see them safe; and he looked with some amusement at the pursuer, expecting to see him wheel his horse and ride back.

But the Mexican capitano did not wheel his horse.

He came right on, and rode up the bank on Texan soil, and his sword flashed in circles over the two wretched figures that lay exhausted in the grass.

A blaze came into the Kid's eyes.

With the fighting on the Mexican side he had nothing to do; no feeling except one of scorn for the whole mob of Greasers, who could find nothing better to do for their country than to

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squabble and fight like a swarm of wild-cats. But when the matter was transferred to Texan soil there was a big difference. On Texan soil the fugitives were under the protection of the Lone Star flag, had anyone been there to enforce its protection. The Rio Kid was there. The law had eager hands stretched out to seize the Rio Kid; but the Kid could stand for the law when the spirit moved him to do so, and it moved him now.

The gun leaped from his belt.

The roar of the Colt was followed by the dropping of the Mexican capitano's sword-arm, broken at the elbow by the bullet.

"Caramba!"

The Mexican's yell of pain and surprise rang loudly, as the Kid strolled down the grassy bluff towards him, the gun still in his hand.

"Beat it, feller!" called out the Kid cheerily. "You want to hit the other side of the river as fast as you know how!"

He made a motion with the revolver; and the Mexican, with a glare of rage, plunged his horse into the river again, and rode for the southern side.

The Kid stood looking after him, with a smiling face, and replaced his spent cartridge with another.

"Gracias, senor!"

It was one of the fugitives that spoke.

They were on their feet now, panting, dripping with water. The Kid glanced round at them and nodded.

"I guess you were getting yours, senor," he remarked.

"A thousand thanks, senorito!"

"One's enough," remarked the Kid. "I guess I wasn't going to let that bulldozer spill your vinegar on Texan soil. You'd sure better levant before they get you with a gun."

The advice was good. From the Mexican side several rifles had begun to ring, and bullets whizzed across the shining water. The Kid, as coolly as if he was unaware that firing was going on, walked back to where he had left his horse under the cottonwood, and the two Mexicans hurried after him. The big trunk of the cottonwood gave them ample cover.

"I guess they haven't learned to shoot yet," the Kid remarked contemptuously, as a bullet whizzed by a couple of yards from the tree. "I could sure pot a bunch of them from here with a six-gun, if they were worth the cartridges, which they ain't."

He looked rather curiously at the two Mexicans he had rescued.

They did not look such ragged scarecrows as most of the rebels. The man who had spoken in English was fat and prosperous-looking, dressed like a well-to-do haciendero; the Kid judged him to be a Mexican ranchero, and the other man, who had no English, something of the same sort. Both of them seemed full of gratitude for the service the Kid had rendered them, and expressed it with Spanish effusiveness. The Kid hardly needed them, as he stood under the cottonwood looking across the river.

The sun was sinking now behind the soaring peaks of the Sierra Madre; the firing had ceased, though every now and then the crackle of shooting burst out faintly from afar, showing that the pursuit of the rebels was still going on in a desultory way. The Kid did not care much for the company he found himself in; he did not like Greasers. But he had saved their lives, and they were fugitives, and the Kid's manners could be irreproachable.

"I reckon I'm bedding down hyer for the night," he told them. "If you two guys can't do better, you're sure welcome to a share of the fire and the bully beef. Say!"

And with many "gracias," the Mexicans accepted the offer, and camped with the Kid; while, far away on the other side of the river, as the sun vanished behind the Sierras, twinkling watch-fires gleamed like stars through the velvety night.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
A Desperate Venture!

DON RICARDO VELASQUEZ talked freely by the smouldering camp-fire in the dark shadow of the cottonwood, in English to the Kid, in Spanish to his companion Sanchez. He was not, the Kid learned, with amusement, a rebel from choice or conviction. His scorn was equally divided between the Ladrones who governed his country and levied heavy taxes upon him, and the other Ladrones who sought to govern it and levy heavier taxes upon him. He had joined the revolution, like many others, for the excellent reason that it had broken out in his province, and it was the only way to save his home from being burnt out by the patriots. Three years, he told the Kid, had passed since the last revolutionary fighting in his province, and in that space of time his ranch had prospered, and he had many herds; but now—— Don Ricardo shrugged his plump shoulders up to his ears.

If the revolution was a success, it could carry on till the next one broke out, at least. But it looked like being a failure, which meant confiscation of his estates and his herds, and for himself, being placed against a blank wall and shot, if he was found on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. There had been fierce fighting for days, he told the Kid; and the one-time puncher of the Double Bar listened without betraying his amusement.

So far as the Kid had seen, some two or three thousand Government troops had been engaged with twice their number of ragged rebels, in the conflict he had watched from afar. With the punchers from half a dozen ranches along the river to back him up, the Kid would have undertaken to wipe out both parties, showing them in the process what fighting really was like. But he was too courteous to tell the Mexican so, and he listened with only polite comments.

It appeared further from the senor's discourse that, although he had saved his ranch from being burnt out by the rebels, by joining in the revolution, he had not exactly trusted his comrades in the cause of Liberty. He possessed a herd of five hundred cows, bred from imported Texan stock, which would have been an irresistible temptation to the hungry patriots, had they been able to lay thievish hands on them.

Prudently the senor had had them

driven into a secret valley in a distant part of his estates, under the care of a couple of faithful half-breeds, to lie hidden there till the fighting was over, or till it drifted away into another district. He had hoped to find an opportunity of driving them across into Texas, his ranch being fortunately so near the border; but he had not found an opportunity; for, once seen, his bunch of cows would have been in equal danger from the troops and from the patriots.

So they were still hidden, feeding in the secret valley, while he, Don Ricardo, was a fugitive from his native land, and dared not venture back across the river for his life, at least, until matters settled down again. The revolution might be successful, though matters looked black at present. If it proved to be a failure he would have to make his peace by bribery. In the meantime, he would lose his cows. Sooner or later they would be found and taken, by one party or the other—or the faithful half-breeds, seeing that he did not return, might take possession of them themselves and drive them away.

He himself, the senor continued, could not venture across the river. He was known, and a marked man. But the valley where the cattle were hidden was not many miles from the Rio Grande. The trails were lonely, and it would not be a long drive to get the beasts into Texas. Under cover of a starry night it was possible for an experienced cowpuncher, who might be able to elude both patriots and troops, and who, at all events, as belonging to neither side, would be safe in making the venture. Don Ricardo talked volubly in this strain, his black eyes watching the Kid's sunburnt face intently, the other man, Sanchez, listening and watching also.

The Rio Kid listened with more interest now.

Cutting out a bunch of cows on the Mexican side of the border, facing danger from both fugitive patriots and victorious troops, was a desperate venture, desperate even in the eyes of the Rio Kid, who thought nothing of setting his life upon a cast.

But the idea appealed to him all the same; all the more, perhaps, because it was so desperate.

The Mexican's words did not delude him. He knew that belonging to neither party would not help him. It would simply give him two sets of enemies instead of one. At every step of the way he would carry his life in his hand. But the Kid was used to that.

He understood the Mexican's view perfectly.

If this reckless puncher undertook the task he would succeed, or he would fail. If he succeeded, so much the better. If he failed, he would be killed; but Don Ricardo would still be on the safe side of the river, so no harm would have been done. Don Ricardo Velasquez, flowing with gratitude and effusive Spanish courtesy, was thinking only of one person—Don Ricardo Velasquez. The Kid was well aware of that, and quite well aware that if he crossed the border on such a desperate errand, the Mexican would hope, but would not expect, to see him alive again. That knowledge, however, only brought a grim smile to the Kid's handsome face.

Don Ricardo, eyeing the Kid through the smoke of a thick, black Mexican cigar, spoke out more plainly at last. His young friend, the senorito who had so gallantly rescued him, was evidently a puncher, and used to cows; evidently a brave man, the bravest of the brave; evidently the man to succeed where a hundred others might fail. Would he care to undertake the task, for a due reward, of course?

"Now you're spilling it," agreed the Kid.

"The young senor is not rich—richissimo?" asked Don Ricardo. And the Kid laughed and shook his head.

"Bring me my herd across the river, and twenty cows shall be your reward."

The Kid laughed again.

"Forget it," he answered.

"A hundred!" said Don Ricardo.

The Kid reflected.

It was madness to make the venture, he knew that. He knew that Don Ricardo and his companion would not have made it for a fortune. But what a greaser dared or dared not mattered little to the Kid. The man was willing to send him to death, on the barest chance of recovering his herd, but the Kid did not resent that. His life had lain on hard paths, and he expected little of his fellow-men. The Kid had left the Frio country behind him. The valley of the Rio Frio had grown too hot to hold him at last. But a man had to live, and the Kid was seeking his fortune.

He spoke at last.

"I guess it's a cinch," he said.

The Mexican hacendero beamed with satisfaction. He spoke to his companion in Spanish and Sanchez beamed also. The Kid had learned that the two were partners in cattle-raising, equally ruined by the revolution and the turn it had taken.

"Muy bien, muy bien, senorito," said Sanchez.

The Kid gave him a wooden look. It did not suit him to let the Mexicans know that he understood Spanish.

"Spill it in Gringo," he said.

Don Ricardo smiled.

"Sanchez, he says that it is very good," he explained.

"It's a cinch, senor," said the Kid, "on terms. I guess I'm not throwing away my life for the fun of the thing. You figure out that there's five hundred cows hidden in that arroyo?"

"Si, senor!"

"I guess I'll cut out that bunch, and drive them across, if a bullet don't stop me," said the Kid. "I take half the herd, and I hand over the other half to you-uns. That's fair."

"That is much to ask, senor," said Don Ricardo.

"I guess not. You lose the whole bunch, or you give half to touch the other half," said the Kid coolly. "I take all the risk. I'm not asking you to come across the river with me."

"Justo!"

The senor assented with a smile.

"Better fix it with your partner, senor," said the Kid, with a yawn. "I reckon if I'm going, I'll hit the trail before the night's much older."

Don Ricardo turned to his companion. The Kid's face was wooden and expressionless, as he heard them talk in Spanish. Sanchez scowled at first, but his scowl gave place to a dark smile as Don Ricardo proceeded. The Kid, examining his revolvers ready for his venture, gave them no heed—the talk apparently conveyed no meaning to his ears.

Neither of the Mexicans dreamed that Spanish was a second tongue to the Rio Kid. Surely if he had understood he would have given sign when Don Ricardo explained the matter to his partner. This dog of a Gringo, the rancher explained in Spanish, claimed half the cows if he succeeded in driving them to safety on the Texan side. Why not agree?

A thousand chances to one, the accursed Gringo would be killed before he had ridden score of yards from the border on the Mexican side. But if he came back with the cows, the thrust of a cuchillo in his ribs would settle the matter of the division. Twenty cows the don would have given in good faith; but if the Gringo claimed half

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the herd for his pains, a knife-thrust would settle the matter cheaply when the time of settlement came. And Sanchez grinned and nodded.

"Muy bein, muy bien!" he assented.

"It is agreed, senorito," said Don Ricardo, breaking into English again as he turned to the Rio Kid. "To my brave young friend I can refuse nothing. Moreover, it is, as you say, fair. Half the herd if you save it for me and drive it here."

"It's a cinch!" said the Kid.

He rose from the camp-fire and stretched himself. Then, with quiet attention, he listened while the Mexican gave him explicit directions—the exact location of the valley, the names of the faithful half-breeds, and what he was to say to them — infinite and multiplied instructions, for the don was exceedingly anxious that his brave young friend should be successful. And the Rio Kid, having absorbed all the knowledge that the Mexican could give him, saddled his mustang and rode away into the night.

The two Mexicans smiled as they sat and smoked over the dying camp-fire The Rio Kid, as he rode away in the darkness, smiled, too.

THE CATTLE-DRIVE AT NIGHT! The Kid's cracking whip drove back the cows that sought to wander from the herd, and the two half-breeds helped him, though their eyes were continually wandering for a sign of danger. (See Chapter 4.)

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Across the Border!

THE grey mustang trod softly through the wide stretch of oozing mud on the Mexican side of the river. The southern night was alive with stars. Far away twinkled the watch-fires of the Mexican soldiers, and the Kid gave those twinkling lights a wide berth. They faded into the night as he pursued his way.

The senor's instructions had been explicit, and the Rio Kid had a keen sense of direction. It was but seldom, if ever, he was at a loss. In the bright starlight he picked up landmark after landmark that had been minutely described to him. He found himself at last on the beaten trail that led to the deserted ranch, and there he rode at a greater speed. A half-burnt house, with a famished dog howling among the charred ruins, loomed up in the starlight. Further on, a scattered group, of wrecked adobe huts, what remained of a village swept out of existence by the tide of warfare.

A jingle of harness, a clatter of hoofs, a shout in Spanish, and the Kid's way was suddenly blocked by horsemen. He had ridden fairly into a detachment returning from pursuit of the rebels. The shout came accompanied by the crack of a rifle and the whir of a bullet that passed within a foot of the Kid's Stetson hat.

There were a dozen horsemen on the trail before him, but the Rio Kid did not halt. His way lay onward.

He gave his mustang the spur.

He rode with his knees gripping his horse, a gun in either hand, his handsome face cool, his eyes like cold steel. In a second he was in the midst of the horsemen drawn up across the road, and wild shouts and cracking shots made pandemonium round him. The Kid's guns spat fire on either side as he drove his way furiously through. Three seconds more and he was galloping wildly up the trail, with the Mexicans yelling behind. Crack on crack rang behind him as he galloped, bending low in the saddle, and as the firing ceased he heard the thudding of pursuing hoofs.

He smiled grimly as he galloped on.

The Kid had not expected to reach the ranch without falling among foes, and he had fallen among them soon enough. Nine or ten riders were galloping behind him, loosing off shots from time to time, no doubt in the belief that they had fallen upon some unusually daring fugitive from the defeated rebel forces. There might be other patrols on the trail, the Kid knew. No wonder Don Ricardo had told his companion, in Spanish, that the Gringo would probably be killed before he had left the river far behind. But the Rio Kid was not easy to kill.

He halted at last, dismounted, and drew his mustang into the cover of a grove of trees by the roadside.

In the blackness of the trees, he stood silent, his hand on the mustang's muzzle.

Thud, thud, thud!

The thudding of hoofs, the jingle of harness, swept up and passed. The Kid listened. If the soldiers discovered that he had halted, he was prepared for a desperate affray in the blackness, with a grim faith in his six-guns and his shooting. But they swept by unknowing, and the thudding of the hoofs died into silence in the distance.

The Kid laughed softly.

He had come through a death-trap alive, and, the danger past, he did not waste another thought of it.

He waited till the last sound had died, and then led his mustang from the pecans and remounted.

But he did not follow the road farther. Open pasture lands lay on either side of the beaten trail, and the Kid trusted himself to the plains. Many times, in the distance, he caught the sounds of hoofs—once he sighted a camp of ragged ruffians, of which party he could not tell, in the light of a burning rancho. More than once he stopped to take cover in a thicket, and waited while riders—whether fugitives or pursuers he knew not—passed him unseeing.

The Kid had hoped to reach the ranch before midnight, for it was not more than six or seven miles across the border; but he found that he had to give up that hope, and that he would be lucky if he reached it alive before morning. For every mile that lay on his way the Kid had to cover many miles, in finding his way through unknown country and eluding incessant foes.

The stars were paling when the Kid sighted, in the distance, the white-walled building of the Velasquez house, and sighted, too, a bivouac of Mexican troopers close by the ranch-house. He did not need to approach the buildings more closely; he had his bearings now for the hidden valley where the bunch of cattle lay, concealed from troops and rebels alike. The landmarks the don had given him—a tall cottonwood, a shoulder-shaped mess, a wayside cross, a ruined fountain, and other signs—he

remembered them every one, and picked them up one after another.

From the pasture lands he entered a tract of low, barren hills, dry and arid, where no one would have thought of seeking cattle. There was no feed for a rabbit for long, barren miles. But the Kid knew that he was on the right track, unless Don Ricardo had been romancing, and he rode on at a trot, while the stars faded and died out, and a faint flush came into the eastern sky.

Dawn was at hand now; and if the day came and found the Kid riding in the open, he knew that he would be seen, and those who saw him were not likely to ask many questions before they pulled trigger. But he was close to his destination at last.

He rode into a narrow, rocky canyon, which looked, from the stony plain he had left, like an arid split in the earth, and nothing more. He was soon riding with his hat below the level of the surrounding plain, secure from observation. So arid and forbidding were his surroundings now that he almost began to doubt the existence of the fertile valley the don had described to him, though he had followed the indications faithfully thus far. He came on it suddenly—a deep, wide ravine, sunk in the low hills, with a stream running through it, and a belt of rich vegetation on either side of the stream.

The sight of water and green grass was gladdening to the eyes of the Kid; it was like an oasis in the midst of the desert. The hiding-place of the herd had been well chosen. Only a cowman well acquainted with the country could have known anything of that hidden fertile spot in the heart of the barren lands. There was feed for several weeks for five hundred head of cattle in the green valley. The Kid could see the cows stretched in the grass as he rode in under the shadow of circling rocks—shadow that was clearing as the sun rose higher. The bunch of cattle was there, safe, so far, from the contending mobs that were plundering all the surrounding ranches. And in the little stone hut that stood close by the rocky wall of the valley, the Kid guessed that he would find the two faithful half-breeds in charge of the herd.

He rode up to the hut. It was a mere shed of hard clay bricks, without a window, and with a low doorway but no door. He heard startled exclamations within; the thud of his mustang's hoofs aroused the sleepers. Two dark, wild faces looked out from the doorway of the hut—the faces of the half-breeds. They stared in astonishment and alarm at the Gringo, and the Kid grinned.

"Amigo!" he called out. "Yo soy amigo, caballeros."

On the other side of the river, for his own reasons, the Kid had spoken no Spanish, but he was speaking Spanish now.

The dark eyes glared at him suspiciously, and the dusky hands were grasping machetes. The Kid's guns looked the breeds in the face.

"Amigo!" he repeated. "One of you speaks English, from what Don Ricardo let on. Which of you is Diego?"

"Soy Diego."

"Good!" said the Kid. "Drop that digger, nombre, or you will go out so quick you won't know what happened to you—sabe?"

The machetes dropped on the mud floor of the hut. At an imperious gesture from the Kid, the two men came out, staring at him wonderingly and suspiciously. In a mixture of English and Spanish the Kid explained why he had come.

They understood, but they shrugged their shoulders.

"No can," said Diego. "The cattle will be taken when they are driven out to the plains. But if it is the order of the senor——"

"His order and mine," said the Kid cheerfully.

"Muy bien, senor," answered Diego. "But the cattle will be taken, and the young senor will be shot."

"I guess that's likely enough," assented the Kid. "All the same, we start at nightfall; and if the young senor is shot, I guess there will be plenty of dry eyes in Mexico and Texas. I reckon I'm bedding down till sunset."

"The young senor is welcome to our shelter," said Diego.

"And the fleas?" said the Kid. "Gracias, but I guess I've got my bed-roll, and I'll find a camp."

And the Kid led his horse up the valley to a shady spot under a cotton-wood, by the stream, where he camped.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Cattle-Drive!

THE long, hot day wore to a close. The grey mustang fed and rested, and the Kid slept for hours in the shadow of the tree. He slept as peacefully as ever he had slumbered in the bunkhouse at the old Double Bar. It was nothing to the Kid that he was in a hostile country, encompassed by foes, with a task before him that might have shaken nerves of steel. Late in the torrid afternoon he clambered to the top of the rocky valley, climbed a high rock, and scanned the surrounding plains. Not a human being, not an animal, was in sight, save a skulking coyote creeping among the rocks. Far in the distance dim smoke rose against the azure of the sky, and he guessed that the Velasquez ranch was burning. No echo of firing reached his ears on the wind; it was likely enough that the fighting was over in that quarter. The troops had won a victory, as the rebels had chanced to be the first to run. The Kid did not doubt that he could have ridden back to the border unchallenged, but with a herd of cattle it was quite a different matter; the puncher knew the slow pace of a cattle-drive. His brow was thoughtful as he returned to the valley.

The sun sank behind the Sierra Madre, night wrapped the Mexican uplands.

"I guess it's time we hit the trail, Diego!" the Kid drawled.

"Si, senor."

The half-breeds did not venture to dispute his orders, but the Kid knew well that they would vanish like rabbits at the first sign of danger. But he did not expect more than that of them. The Kid's Texan quirt, and the long whips of the 'breeds cracked like pistol-shots, and the unwilling cattle were got into motion. The herd tramped slowly out of the green valley, by way of the rocky canyon to the upper plain, under the stars, that were coming out in the velvety sky like handfuls of diamonds.

It was but six miles to the river, but the way the Kid had mapped out in his mind covered more than twenty. The cattle-drive wound away to the westward, making a wide sweep to avoid the battle-ground of the previous day. The Kid was as handy a puncher as any man on the Texas ranches, and his mustang was used to the work. His cracking quirt drove back cows that sought to wander from the herd, and the two 'breeds helped him in the drive, though their black, scintillating eyes were continually wandering for a sign of danger as they sat the wiry little Indian ponies and gashed their flanks with the long, cruel Mexican spurs.

Hour after hour the drive went on under the stars. With whip and voice the Kid and the Mexicans urged on the slow, unwilling cattle. Twice or thrice dusky 'breeds were seen, who stared at

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the passing herd, but did not offer to interfere.

The Kid was heading for a crossing a dozen miles farther up the Rio Grande, and his hopes grew higher as the night wore on. He had taken the most desperate of chances, but he looked like getting away with it. And if he succeeded two hundred and fifty cows were to be his reward—a welcome accession of fortune to the Kid, who had ridden out of the Frio country with little more than his guns and his horse to call his own. By dim trails and shadowy plains the drive went on. Here and there a cow, or half a dozen cows, escaped from the herd, in spite of the Kid's vigilance and unceasing activity, but the main herd rumbled and thudded on. The Kid was far enough now from the scene of the fighting he had watched the previous day, and following a beaten trail he knew, for this was not the first time that the Rio Kid had ridden across the border. And when the first flush of another dawn was in the sky he saw the welcome waters of the Rio Grande rolling in the distance before him.

"I guess that's the ford, hombres," he called out cheerily to the Mexicans.

"Si, senor!"

The cattle-drove thudded on to the river.

"Los soldados!"

It was a sudden yell of alarm from the Mexicans.

The Kid gritted his teeth.

The drive had reached the muddy, swampy banks, and the Kid's quirt was driving the unwilling leaders into the shallow waters. Where the leading cows went the rest would follow; but they were reluctant to take the water. The Kid stared round, his eyes glittering under the brim of his Stetson. He had felt that his luck was too good to hold. What he saw might have daunted any heart. A mounted patrol was coming up the river at a trot, doubtless guarding the river against rebel fugitives seeking to escape into Texas.

At the sight of the herd they put spurs to their horses and came on at a gallop. With the same glance the Kid saw the two half-breeds spurring their ponies in the opposite direction, and they were gone from his sight in a few seconds.

Only that one glance the Kid gave, and then his attention was grimly fixed on the herd again. He shouted, and lashed, and drove on the cows, and innumerable hoofs splashed up muddy water. In the midst of the snorting herd the solitary puncher laboured, driving like one possessed, doing the work of a dozen men. The Mexican carabineers were coming up at a gallop, and the Kid knew that he would never save all the herd. But he stuck doggedly to his task, even when bullets began to whistle through the air, and the soldiers were so close that he could hear their shouting. Sweating, dripping, spattered with mud, the Kid rode out of the shallow water on the northern side, driving before him a big bunch of cows. He looked back, and saw that the carabineers had halted on the southern side, and he wondered whether they would venture to pursue him across the border. It would have been easy enough at the lonely ford, a score of miles from a frontier post. But the soldiers contented themselves with blazing away with their carbines across the river and gathering in the cows—a third of the herd—that the Kid had been compelled to abandon. A fold of the prairie soon hid him from their sight.

The Kid pushed back his Stetson and wiped his streaming forehead.

"I guess that was a close call," he confided to the grey mustang. "I sure reckon it was the tightest corner we ever got out of, old hoss!"

And the Kid halted to rest his weary limbs and his weary horse, and to count the cows that he had saved. And the tale was three hundred.

undertake to save the whole herd. Three hundred was all I drove across the Rio Grande."

"Three hundred!" repeated Don Ricardo.

"Yep."

"But here"—the Mexican's eyes roved over the bunch—"but here there are but half so many, senorito."

The Kid smiled.

"I guess half the cows I saved belong to me, senor. Wasn't that the terms?"

"But where are they?"

"I reckon I've left them where I can pick them up," said the Kid. "Here's your half of the herd, and you're mighty lucky to see a single cow of the bunch."

The two Mexicans exchanged glances.

"Ah! You have lost some of my cows, senorito," said Don Ricardo softly. "For your reward, little senor, you shall have the cows you have left in Mexico—if you can find them. Will that satisfy you?"

"I guess not," said the Kid, laughing. "I have taken my reward, senor—a hundred and fifty cows, that I've left where I can pick them up. Don't worry about my reward, senor. Yo lo, tengo."

Don Ricardo gave a start as the Kid spoke in Spanish.

"Sabe?" grinned the Kid.

The Mexican "savvied" well enough, and his hand was on his knife.

The Kid's hands rested on his guns in his low-hung holsters. There was an amused smile on his face.

"Keep your cuchillo where it is, senor," he advised.

Bang!

The Mexican's knife was in his hand. He did not even see the Kid draw his gun. The Rio Kid was lightning on the draw. He felt the shock that jarred through his arm from wrist to shoulder as the cuchillo was torn from his hand by a bullet. He gave a cry, and Sanchez, who had half-drawn a knife, jammed it back into his belt and threw his hands above his head. The Kid laughed loud and long.

"Muy bien, senores, muy bien!" he chuckled. "You dog-goned Greasers, what's to stop me from letting daylight through you and roping in the whole bunch?"

"Senor——" stammered the Mexican rancher.

"Can it!" interrupted the Kid. "I guess I'm a man of my word. There's your cows—half the bunch. Adios, senores!"

The Rio Kid jumped on his mustang and rode away, and, with a clatter of hoofs and a cloud of dust, he was gone.

THE END.

(You'll all enjoy reading: "A Deal In Cows!"—next week's stirring long complete tale of the RIO KID, the boy outlaw of Texas. Tell all your pals about this wonderful series of stories!)

A RIDE FOR LIFE! The Kid rode with his knees gripping his horse, and a gun in either hand. In a second he was in the midst of the horsemen, firing right and left as he sped past. (*See Chapter 3.*)

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Kid's Way!

"POR todos los santos! He comes!"

It was no wonder that Don Ricardo Velasquez invoked all the saints, in his astonishment, as he beheld the Rio Kid. For a night and a day, and a night and most of the day again, Don Ricardo and Sanchez had waited at the camp, under the cottonwood, hoping, but far from expecting, to see the puncher and the cows. And now they saw.

They saw a bunch of a hundred and fifty cows, with the Rio Kid riding hard.

They watched him as he came. The Kid rode up to the cottonwood, and drew rein, and saluted the Mexicans.

"You have returned, senorito," said Don Ricardo.

"I guess so. And I've brought your cows, senor," answered the Rio Kid as he dismounted. "I guess I didn't