ANOTHER POWERFUL YARN OF ADVENTURE IN MEXICO!

The TRAIL of VENGEANCE!

BY

RALPH REDWAY.

It would be an easy matter for the Rio Kid to cut and run and leave his two companions, total strangers to him, to the perils of the forest. But that's not like the Kid!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The End of the Rope!

THE night had been cold, as usual on the Mexican uplands, but with day came a blaze of heat.

In the dense tropical forest by the Rio Rojo thick interlaced branches, massed with foliage and pendant mosses, shut off the burning rays of the sun, but did not shut off its heat. The Rio Kid, leaning against the massive trunk of a ceiba, fanned his face with his Stetson hat. Day had come and with the daylight he looked for pursuit from Guzman Carrero and his bunch. But as yet there had been no sound of foes in the forest; and the wide waters of the Rio Rojo rolled in the sunshine, desolate, deserted.

The forest grew down to the river's edge, and great branches jutted over the water. In the mud of the bank, amid tangled roots, lizards crawled, the bell-frog sounded his peculiar note.

The thought came into the Rio Kid's mind that perhaps that desperate race in the night, down the river, had thrown the pursuers off the track. But he shook his head.

"I guess this hyer bunch is cinched!" murmured the Kid, and he looked once more to his walnut-butted guns, to make sure that they were ready for the conflict that must come; the conflict that could end only one way, unless the Kid had phenomenal luck.

His companions were sleeping.

Donna Estrella, wrapped in the Kid's blanket and slicker, lay sleeping the sleep of utter fatigue. Don Antonio Pasquale was hunched in the herbage, snoring. He had forgotten his terrors in the sleep of exhaustion; but even in slumber his claw-like hand clutched the saco buckled to his belt; even in his dreams he had not forgotten the pesos with which he had fled from Olillo.

The Kid's face grew grim and hard as he looked at the wrinkled old face of the Mexican. But it softened again as he glanced at Estrella. The Kid had slept, but he had wakened at dawn, watchful for the enemy. But it was useless to awake his companions. The Kid figured that the fugitives were at the end of their rope; and nothing remained but to wait. And he waited. It would have been easy enough for the Kid to plunge into the deep forest and save himself. But that thought did not enter the mind of the boy puncher.

His glance travelled over the sunny waters of the Rio Rojo, beyond the branches that drooped over the margin. It was down the river he reckoned the enemy would come. But as yet, he could see no sign of the Mexicans.

Pasquale stirred at last, and woke. He sat up, passing his claw-like hand over his brow and staring round him. He dragged himself wearily to his feet. He looked round at the dense trees, at the shining river, and fixed his glance at last on the impassive face of the Rio Kid.

"Senor! We have escaped them?" he muttered.

The Kid smiled grimly.

"Not by a jugful," he answered.

"Don Guzman—he comes?" breathed the old Mexican.

"Not yet! Them jaspers don't seem to be in a hurry," drawled the Kid. "I guess that's the way of this country, feller—Greasers sure don't hustle a whole heap. But they'll come, you can bet your bottom dollar on that."

"Then why do we linger here, senor?"

The Kid shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess we're at the end of the riata, senor. We've lost the horses and the mule—my mustang is the only cayuse left in this bunch. He's a good hoss, is Side-Kicker; he sure is the durndest critter to go that ever was raised in Texas. But I reckon he can't carry three. This bunch is cinched, senor—we only got to wait till them Greasers root us out. I reckon we've got them guessing where to look for us, or they'd have been hyer afore this. But they'll come."

Pasquale trembled from head to foot.

At the sound of voices the Mexican girl had awakened.

She threw aside the slicker and rose to her feet, colouring under the eyes of the Rio Kid. Her hair was in wild disorder, her beautiful face stained by the mud of the river, but it was still beautiful. The Kid's heart, little accustomed to yield to such influences, stirred as he looked at her. It was the chivalry of the boy puncher that had led him to join up with the hunted Mexican fugitives, but there was perhaps some-

thing more than that in his honest breast now.

The girl's dark eyes glanced rapidly round.

"Senor el Tejano! We are safe here?" she breathed.

The Kid's answer was gentler than that he had given to her father.

"I reckon we're O.K. jest for the present, senorita," he answered. "Them guys ain't run us down yet."

"They must have lost the track?"

"I guess there's a chance they have, miss," said the Kid, "but I wouldn't bank on it."

The girl understood.

"They will find us here?" she said in a low voice.

"Well, that galoot, Guzman Carrero, is sure a bloodhound on the trail," said the Kid uneasily. "He's after them pesos your padre has got in his grip, and he's got a hunch that Don Antonio double-crossed the junta that them revolutionary jaspers belong to. He sure does seem to want Mister Pasquale's scalp bad. I hope he's lost the trail, miss, for your sake; but I allow he ain't the kind of guy to lose a trail easy."

"Let us go!"

"That ain't so easy, miss," said the Kid apologetically. "We got one hoss among three and we're in a pesky forest where the going's slow and hard. I reckon we wouldn't get far afore them rubes run us down."

The Mexican girl clasped her hands.

"We wait here—like sheep for the slaughter," she whispered. "Oh, senor! Save my father! Leave me, but save him!"

The Kid made a grimace. Exactly the reverse was his own desire. Only for Donna Estrella's sake would he have lifted a finger to save the wrinkled old rascal whose greed and treachery, as the Kid was only too well aware, had caused this trouble. But the girl's devotion to her wretched father touched him strangely.

"I guess, miss," said the Kid slowly, "that if Don Antonio has a hunch to try it on, I'll lend him my cayuse, and he can hit the horizon as soon as he likes. But there ain't a dog's chance of getting clear of them bucks, miss. This is as good a place as any other when it comes to a rookus. I guess a whole heap of them Greasers will go under afore they finish with this Kid. That's all I can do, miss."

The Kid's glance wandered to the river. Far in the distance a sombrero nodded over the shining waters. A horseman was riding the shallows near the bank, slowly, watching the forest as he rode. He was small in the distance, but he was approaching. And

(*Continued on next page.*)

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the Kid knew that he was only one of the scouts of Carrero's bunch. Jutting trees hid him the next moment. But the Kid had seen him, and knew that the enemy were closing in.

"Senor! Save my father!" breathed Donna Estrella. "They wrong him, senor—he is an innocent man! He never betrayed the junta—and what he has is his own, senor. You will not leave him to those wolves. Save him, senor."

The Kid stirred uneasily.

"Look here, you'uns," he said at last. "I guess there's a chance—a mighty slim chance. Them jaspers allow that Don Antonio's lit out with the pesos belonging to the junta at Olillo. They're after his blood—but I reckon they want the money more than they want his juice. They'll be here afore long. If we leave that bag of money here for them to find there's just a dog's chance that they may let up. Stick that bag of pesos on the bank where they'll sure have to see it—and we'll try our luck in the forest."

"Si, si, senor."

But though the Mexican girl answered at once in the affirmative, the old miser of Olillo clutched at the saco and croaked out a negative.

"Jamas! Jamas! Never! You would make me a beggar! Jamas!"

"I guess a live beggar's better than a dead rico hombre, feller," said the Kid, "and you're sure a dead man if you stick to them pesos."

"They are mine—mine!"

"Them jaspers allow they're theirs," said the Kid. "But it don't cut no ice either way, as they can cinch them when they like. You can't keep them durocks, feller. You can leave them here or they'll take them from your dead body. That's your choice."

Splash!

The Kid's glance turned swiftly to the river. The horseman he had seen had reappeared, close at hand. The man, scanning the bank, uttered an exclamation, which told that he had picked up sign. The Kid's hand dropped to a gun, his face set grimly. The horseman came spurring on through the shallow water under overhanging branches.

Bang!

The sombrero spun on the Mexican's head.

"Caramba!" the Kid heard him yell.

He swung round his horse and went dashing madly away up the stream. In a moment he had vanished.

"I guess that jasper's gone to bring down the bunch," said the Kid. "If we're going to make a break we ain't a lot of time to waste, you'uns. There's a slim chance they'll let up if we leave them the pesos. There ain't any dog-goned chance otherwise."

"Mi padre!" whispered the Mexican girl pleadingly.

There was a struggle in the breast of the old miser. The perspiration stood in clots on his swarthy brow. His hand went to the saco—and came away again. But even the wretched old miser seemed to realise that it was not possible to cling longer to the funds of the revolutionary junta, with which he had fled. With trembling fingers he unbuckled the saco and relinquished the leather, stuffed with gold and silver and paper money.

Taking it carelessly, the Kid walked down to the margin of the Rio Rojo.

From there, at a distance up the river, he could see the nodding of sombreros. It would not be long before the Mexicans were on hand. They were coming along the shallow margin of the rio under the forest branches, and they would enter the forest where the fugitives had entered it. Good man as the Kid was in a fight, the odds were too heavy to give him a chance, and the game was in Don Guzman's hands if he pushed matters to an extremity. There was, as the Kid had said, a dog's chance that the vengeful Mexican might relinquish the pursuit when he had recovered the stolen pesos. The Kid placed little faith in it, but it was the only chance that remained.

On an overhanging bough, over the shallows, in full sight of any man coming down the river, the Kid hung the sack of pesos.

There it could not fail to meet the eyes of Don Guzman and his bunch, when they came. And they were coming.

Leaving the precious saco hanging over the stream, the Kid rejoined his companions. There was a faint hope in Donna Estrella's face, but the old Mexican was wringing his hands, as if in despair. Parting with his loot seemed almost as terrible to him as parting with his life. The look he gave the Kid was black, and bitter, and hostile. But the puncher did not heed that. Only too willingly, but for the senorita's sake, he would have left the old miser, as well as his loot, in the hands of the avengers.

The Kid lost no time now. The black-muzzled mustang was roused and the Mexican girl seated in the Kid's saddle. The Kid and Pasquale tramped on foot,

THEIR HIDING-PLACE ALOFT! With never a pause, the Rio Kid swung himself from tree to tree; and within a few minutes of looking the last on his devoted horse, he arrived at the place where he had left his companions. (*See Chapter 3.*)

the Kid leading, the old Mexican trailing behind the horse. They plunged into the shadowy depths of the tropical forest and vanished from the bank of the Rio Rojo. But in the tangled undergrowth the trail they had to leave was plain enough for a blind man to follow, and the Kid knew only too well that there was no hope of eluding the enemy unless the return of the loot gave him pause.

The dense forest swallowed the fugitives. But from behind came sounds of the unseen enemy. There was a splashing of horses in the water, a shouting in Spanish.

"Los pesos! El traidor! El traidor!"

The pursuers had found the bag of money. But the shouts of "The traitor!" did not indicate that the finding of the stolen pesos had satisfied them. The Rio Kid hoped for the best as he wound his way through the dense tropical forest, leading the mustang. But in his heart he knew that there was little hope.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Gun Play!

THE Kid paused to listen.

Under the thick masses of foliage a dusky twilight reigned in the forest, simmering with tropical heat. Here and there the Kid had to cut a way through the dense, tangled undergrowths with slashes of his bowie-knife. Sounds of pursuit reached his ears, and they were drawing closer. Don Guzman had not been satisfied with the recovery of the junta's

pesos. It was the life of the traitor he was seeking; and it was his to take, so far as the Kid could see. But it was some relief to the Kid, at least, that the stolen money was gone.

And the fight was coming now. Closer and closer came the sounds of pursuit in the dense forest. By such a way, no horse could proceed faster than at a walk, and frequently there were pauses for the mustang to force a way through dense growths, aided by the Kid's knife. The Kid figured that the Mexicans had left their horses, and were following the trail on foot, and undoubtedly they were gaining. The way was easier for the pursuers than for the fugitives, who were blazing their way. Light, running footsteps reached the Kid's ears, echoing through the forest, and a rustling of branches and twigs. The avengers were closing in.

Donna Estrella's dark eyes turned on the Kid as he paused.

"Apresurese usted—hasten, senor!" she breathed. "Venga usted."

"I guess they're close behind, senorita," answered the Kid quietly. "That sack of pesos ain't stopped them, but I reckon my gun may help. You 'uns push on. I guess I'm aiming to show them jaspers that it ain't safe to crowd this Kid."

"The holy saints preserve you, senor!"

The Kid dropped behind, the mustang pushing on, with the old Mexican tramping at his tail. The Kid's gun was in his hand now as he posted himself in a mass of hanging llianas, through which the fugitives had passed, and waited.

He had not long to wait.

A sombrero showed in the dusk, a swarthy face, a pair of glinting, watchful black eyes. It was Don Guzman Carrero, the leader of the revolutionary bunch, picking up the trail ahead of his men. Through a slit in the llianas the Kid's six-gun was aimed—but he did not pull the trigger.

It went against the grain with the Kid to shoot down an enemy without warning, even a deadly enemy close on his trail, seeking his life. From his cover he grimly watched the square-jawed Mexican haciendado, as he came on. Don Guzman was within six feet of the Kid when the boy puncher rapped out suddenly:

"Put 'em up, Greaser!"

Carrero started violently. He had not expected the hunted fugitives to halt. There was a revolver in his hand, but he did not raise it as he saw the Kid's muzzle looking at him from the llianas, the Kid's eyes gleaming over it.

But there was no fear in the Mexican's face. He looked coolly at the half-seen face of the boy puncher from Frio.

"You, Senor el Tejano!" he said.

"Jest me," agreed the Kid. "I've told you to grab the air, senor, and I ain't waiting."

Don Guzman lifted his hands above his head. But he smiled darkly as he obeyed.

"It is of little use, senorito," he said. "My men are close behind—more than a score, senorito."

"I guess your galoots won't bite so hard without you to lead them, senor," said the Kid. "Drop that gun!"

Don Guzman's revolver dropped to the earth. But there was a mocking smile on his swarthy face. The rustling footsteps of his followers were close behind.

"I guess I'm going to chew the rag with you a piece," said the Kid. "Call out to your jaspers to stop."

"Para!" called out the Mexican.

The rustling ceased.

"I listen, seror," said Don Guzman politely. "It is always a pleasure to exchange words with a brave caballero."

The Kid grunted. He was not in a mood himself for flowing Spanish courtesy.

"Jest you chew on this, Don Guzman," he said. "That old lobo-wolf, Pasquale ain't the kind of hombre I'd save from a necktie party—he sure ain't. But his daughter thinks a whole heap of him. You've got back the money you say he robbed you of——"

"Do you not take my word that that old traitor robbed the junta of Olillo, senor?"

"I guess I'd rather take your word than his," admitted the Kid. "I sure never saw a galoot that got my goat worse'n he does. Anyhow, you've cinched the pesos—I've made him leave them. You've got them?"

"Si, senor."

"Now you want to let up," said the Kid persuasively. "What's the good of running the thing into the ground? You've got a fight ahead if you come on—I guess you've seen my shooting, and you've found out that I'm all wildcat from the toes up. I guess I can blow your cabeza into little pieces to begin with, feller—I've got you covered. Let up, feller. Let that old lobo-wolf get clear to the border—for the senorita's sake."

"I am desolated to refuse you, senor," answered Don Guzman, with a shake of the head. "Believe me, senor, I respect you, and would willingly spare your life. The senorita is as safe from harm as if she were in her home at Olillo. But the junta he has betrayed has doomed the traitor to death—and he must die!"

"Dog-gone, your pesky junta!" growled the Kid. "I reckon you're the king-pin of the bunch, Don Guzman, and what you say goes."

"Sin duda, senor! But not for all the wealth of all the mines of Mexico would I spare the traitor!"

"Then it's goin' to be a rookus!" said the Kid.

"Unless you stand out of the matter, which, after all, is not your concern, Senor el Tejano!" suggested the Mexican. "Leave us to deal with that old picaro, and ride with the senorita where you choose."

"I guess I'd jump to it, if the senorita said yes," grunted the Kid. "That old lobo-wolf sure gets my goat. But I'm in this up to the neck, feller. You got to let up on Pasquale or walk over my guns."

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders.

"You go first, hombre," said the Kid, his eyes gleaming with menace over the levelled revolver.

"A Mexican caballero does not fear death, senor! Fire—my men will speedily avenge me," said Don Guzman coolly.

The Kid's finger was pressing on the trigger. But he relaxed it. He could not shoot down the man who faced death coolly, with a smile on his face. The Mexican watched him curiously.

"Senor, it would be little use to kill me," he said. "Every man in my party is as determined as I that the traitor shall not live. There are a score of men close at hand—two score more are following. Why waste your life in a quarrel that is not your own? Have the dark eyes of Donna Estrella bewitched you?"

The Kid coloured.

"Cut that out, dog-gone you!" he growled. "You ain't letting up on that old lobo-wolf?"

"No, senor! Never!"

"Then I guess I got to spill your juice."

Don Guzman gave another shrug of the shoulders.

"Dog-gone you!" snapped the Kid. "I reckon you know that I can't let daylight through a man standing with his hands up. Dog-gone all Greasers! I reckon I ought to wipe you out. But you've sure got a whole heap of pluck for a Greaser! But there's more ways of killing a coyote than feeding him on canned beef. You're going to be put out of this rookus for a piece, Don Guzman, and I guess I ain't forgot how to crease an ornery cayuse."

Bang!

The roar of the six-gun followed the Kid's words.

The Mexican gave a cry and pitched headlong to the ground. While the report still echoed in the trees the Rio Kid hurried after the fugitives; and from behind he heard the rushing footsteps and furious cries of the Mexicans gathering round their fallen leader. They found him senseless on the ground, with blood flowing down his face; but they soon found that he was not dead, or even badly hurt. The Kid had "creased" the chief of the Olillo junta, the bullet, grazing his head, had stunned him. For the time Don Guzman was senseless and out of the fight; but he was worth many dead men yet. Four or five of the Mexicans remained with their insensible leader; the rest, with fierce cries, pushed on in pursuit of the man who had shot him down.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

From the dense cover ahead of the Mexicans came the roar of the Rio Kid's six-guns.

The Kid was shooting in deadly earnest now. He had to stop the rush or to be overwhelmed by it. A Mexican crashed to the earth and lay still—another reeled and fell, groaning; a third clung to a tree, sorely wounded. The rush, had it gone on, must have overwhelmed the Kid, fast and accurately as he handled his guns; but the Mexicans, no longer led by the indomitable Don Guzman, were daunted by the deadly fire. The rush stopped, and the Mexicans scattered into thick cover. And the Rio Kid turned once more and hurried after the fugitives ahead of him in the forest. The pursuit was checked, and if there was a chance left the Rio Kid was the hombre to make the most of it.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The False Trail!

"MADRE DE DIOS!" groaned Antonio Pasquale; and he stumbled and fell in the underbrush.

The Kid breathed hard.

He was fatigued himself; even the iron-limbed mustang showed signs of fatigue. The girl, seated on the mustang, was silent, and seemed to the Kid only half-conscious, so worn down was she by the hard going through the tropical Mexican forest. How the old man of Olillo had kept on so long the Kid hardly knew—terror at his heels drove him on, and he tottered and limped and stumbled long after the Kid had expected him to break down from exhaustion. But now Pasquale had reached the end of his strength, and even the fear of death could not drive him farther. He lay where he had fallen, babbling to the saints to aid him.

The Kid pulled the mustang to a halt. For hours—long, burning hours—in the heat of the sun-scorched forest,

they had pushed on, after the Kid's guns had checked the pursuit. They were still followed—the Kid was certain of that—but for the time Don Guzman Carrero was out of action, and the pursuit did not come close.

Had the strength of the fugitives held out there was a remote chance of escape yet—had they been but able to hold on their way till night fell on the forest. But there was no hope for it—and now the old miser of Olillo had petered out completely.

The forest seemed interminable, stretching endless, dense, tangled, untrodden by the foot of man, as lonely and desolate as in the days before the Conquistadores landed in Mexico. From leafy branches, jaguars had stared down, with glittering eyes, at the fugitives—amid the massy trunks and giant ferns, serpents writhed from their path. But such perils passed unheeded, with vengeance and death behind. Donna Estrella seemed in a trance of fatigue; but she woke to alarm as her father collapsed in the thicket. Her dark eyes turned on him, and then on the Kid, and then she slid from the back of the mustang.

She sank on her knees beside her father. The tears were streaming down her cheeks, and the Kid's heart ached to see it. Little as he liked the old miser, he would have given his life to save him, and dry the tears of the Mexican girl. But the Kid was at the end of his rope. All that was left to him was a hopeless struggle against odds when the pursuers came.

"Mi padre—mi padre!" whispered Estrella.

"Hija mia, I am a dead man! Nombre de Dios! Nombre de Dios!" moaned Pasquale.

"Senor!" The dark, weeping eyes turned on the dismayed face of the Kid. "Save him, senor! Save my father! Noble caballero, save an old man from assassins!"

"I guess they won't touch him till they've wiped me out, senorita," said the Kid. "But that's the pesky limit! We ain't got a dog-goned chance left miss, and I'm telling you!"

The girl's faith in him, her belief that he could yet do something to save the wretched old man, touched the Kid and stirred his heart. But he could do nothing but die in defence of the wretch, and even that could not save him.

The girl bent her head to listen.

"I do not hear them, senor. Perhaps they have lost the track," she whispered.

The Kid shook his head. He did not hear sounds of pursuit, but he knew that the pursuers were not far away. The track in the dense forest was not likely to be lost. The delay, he was well aware, was only caused by Don Guzman being put out of action. But with him or without him, it would go on to the fatal finish. The struggle of the fugitives was like that of an animal in a net. The end was only postponed, and must come all the same.

"They must not find my father, senor! Save my father! You are a brave caballero; you will save him?"

The girl was asking the impossible, and the Kid could only stand silent, with a heavy heart. Her dark eyes glanced round at the wall of greenery.

"If we could hide, senor."

The Kid smiled faintly.

"I guess they'd root us out fast enough, senorita, when they hit the end of the trail," he said.

"Cierto!" murmured the girl. "Siguro! But—but——" It seemed that, in the stress of her father's peril, the girl's brain worked more actively than the Kid's. "The caballo, senor—your horse—drive him on, and he will leave a trail that may deceive them."

The Kid started.

"Gee!" he muttered.

"Drive on the horse, senor. It is a chance, if but a feeble one—a chance that they may fail to find us!"

The Kid stood grim and silent.

Not for a moment had it occurred to his mind to part with his faithful steed. The grey mustang that had been the tried comrade in all his dangers, whose speed and intelligence had so often saved him from his foes. To part with Side-Kicker, for the sake of that old picaro with the face of a wolf—— Then the Kid smiled at his own folly. When the finish came, he would have to part with Side-Kicker, and the finish could not be long delayed. And he could only hope, when he went down under the machetes, that the cayuse would find a kind master among the Mexicans into whose hands he would fall. And there was a chance, as the girl said—a feeble chance. The pursuers would press on, on the trail of the mustang, through the dense underwoods, and the fugitives might remain in hiding, and elude their eyes. There was a chance!

The girl did not understand his hesitation. She did not know that parting with his horse was, to the puncher, like parting with life itself.

"Senor, it may save us!"

The Kid nodded.

"I guess it's the big idea, miss," he said. "I wouldn't bank too high on it; but it's jest a chance, as you say. I reckon I got to let the cayuse go, when they get me. And I guess it won't hurt me none to tie a can to Side-Kicker an hour ahead of time. You've said it, miss."

Having resolved, the Kid did not lose a moment. Far off in the forest sounded a shot, doubtless a signal of some Mexican scout. But the enemy were not yet near. The Kid scanned his surroundings, and picked up the wizened old Mexican in his strong arms. He stepped lightly through the thickets, taking care to break no twig or tendril, and laid the old man down at the foot of a towering ceiba—a giant tree, that grew to a height of more than a hundred feet—a mountain of vast branches and foliage. Then he returned and drew the girl to the foot of the tree, leaving the mustang standing where he had halted.

"We got to hump it into this hyer tree, miss," said the Kid. "I guess there's cover in them branches for a hundred galoots. If the jaspers behind us give us time."

He said no more, but clambered into the ceiba, uncoiling his lasso as he went, the loop already round the shoulders of the fainting Pasquale. The girl stood silent, leaning on the tree, while the Kid drew on the rope from above, and the old Mexican was drawn up the trunk. He disappeared into the foliage, and the Kid landed him in a fork between two huge branches, and secured him there with a length cut from the rope. Then he lowered the lasso again to Estrella.

With the help of the rope, the girl climbed the massive trunk, and the thick foliage swallowed her. In the fork between two mighty branches, was a space several feet in extent, a safe resting-place. The girl sank down there, beside her father, leaning back against a branch.

"Keep mum, miss," said the Kid. "I guess I'll be back when I've started the cayuse on a leetle pasear on his lone-some."

He dropped from the tree and returned to the horse. With a grim, clouded face, the Kid signed to Side-Kicker to go on, and followed him, tramping heavy and deep in the undergrowth, slashing branches with his bowie-knife, to leave the plainest trail he could. The pursuers were to be led past the big ceiba that hid the fugitives, and the Kid was leaving a trail for them that they could not miss. For a hundred yards he forced his way on through dense tropical growths, and then he stopped. There was no more time to lose. He took his rifle and slicker pack from the horse, his sunburnt face darkly clouded. It wrung his heart to part with Side-Kicker, and the knowledge that there was no help for it did not make it easier.

"Beat it, old hoss!" murmured the Kid huskily. "Beat it, you old cayuse! If I live, I'll sure find you again, if I have to trail you all over Mexico, from the Rio Grande to Yucatan. I sure will, old hoss. Beat it!"

Side-Kicker looked round at him, not understanding. The Kid struck him slightly on the flank and pointed. The intelligent animal understood then, and plunged on through the tropical thickets.

The Kid stood watching him with a heavy heart.

Side-Kicker looked round once, perplexity in his eyes. The Kid waved him on, and the horse went plunging through the undergrowths, trampling a trail, breaking bush and branch with his shoulders as he forced his way. He disappeared from the Kid's sight, leaving him with a strange sense of forlornness.

With a deep sigh, the Kid turned away.

But he did not follow the trail back to the ceiba. He swung himself into the boughs overhead, and worked his way back from branch to branch, without touching the ground. The thick forest formed a network of interlaced branches, so close that one tree could hardly be distinguished from another. It was not the first time that the Kid had thus avoided leaving a trail, and it was necessary that there should be no track leading back to catch a wary eye among the pursuers. How the Kid found his way through the wilderness of locked branches, back to the ceiba, would have puzzled any man whose life had not been spent in llano and forest. But the Kid never paused; and within

(*Continued on page 28.*)

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The Trail of Vengeance!

(*Continued from page 17.*)

a few minutes after looking his last on Side-Kicker, he was in the branches of the great ceiba where he had left the fugitives.

Donna Estrella's dark eyes met his.

"I guess the cayuse is gone, miss," whispered the Kid. "There's sure a trail to lead them jaspers on a fool's chase. If they get wise to it, the game's up; but there's a dog's chance. I reckon a sheriff's outfit in Texas wouldn't be fooled that-a-way, and the old Double-Bar bunch would sure smile at such a trick; but them Greasers may fall for it. I guess they're more stuck on revolutions and pronunciamientos than on raising a trail." He started and listened. "Silencio!"

There was a sound in the forest. The rustling and crashing of Side-Kicker had died away in the distance. From closer at hand came a sound. The Kid put his finger on his lips.

Silently he moved on a thick branch. From a slit in the mass of foliage he watched the ground below where the trail lay. A sombrero was almost beneath him. Another and another appeared from the shades of the forest. Swarthy men were tramping the trail. And a man walking a horse followed, sitting heavily in the saddle. His sombrero hid him, but a movement revealed, for a moment, bandages below the hat, and the Kid knew that it was Don Guzman. Silent, watchful as a cougar crouched on a branch, the Kid eyed the Mexicans passing almost directly beneath him. Many of them looked weary and sullen, some savagely fierce; and muttered threats and curses in Spanish reached the puncher's ears above.

They wound on, and vanished into the forest ahead. But more followed, twos and threes, then a bunch of six—then, singly, a dozen more swarthy men trailed past. The last of them disappeared in the forest from the Kid's watching eyes. The Kid listened with painful intentness. Don Guzman and the men ahead must have reached, by *this time, the spot where the Kid had parted* with Side-Kicker. If they stopped; if they scented the trick, then it was the end of the rope. He listened; but there was no sound from the Mexicans now—no sign of a return. The rustling and swaying and trampling passed on and on, till every sound was lost in the silence of the forest.

The Kid drew a deep, deep breath.

The pursuit had passed, following the trail of the mustang through the dense Mexican forest. The pursuers had passed and gone, led on a false scent, and there was a glimpse of hope that the fugitives might yet escape the trail of vengeance.

THE END.

(*"HUNTED DOWN!", is the title of next week's roaring long complete story of the Rio Kid in Mexico.*)

PLAYING THE GAME!

(*Continued from page 8.*)

"I was thinking the same, and wondering how long it would be before you came to it," he said.

And in the Rag that day there was a meeting, at which the Bounder was not present. But after the meeting Harry Wharton strolled along to Study No. 4 in the Remove. He found Vernon-Smith and Redwing there.

The Bounder eyed him as he entered. His face expressed nothing, but Tom Redwing's was bright.

"Smithy, old man," said Wharton, plunging into the subject directly, "we've had a Form meeting, and the sentence is knocked on the head. I'm sorry it ever came to that."

"So am I," said the Bounder. "I'm not grumbling; the sentence was fair enough for what I did."

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton. "You see that?"

"I'm not a fool," said Vernon-Smith composedly. "I was let off lightly. That's a fact."

Wharton smiled.

"Well, it's all over now," he said. "Nobody wants to keep you out of the cricket; and, if you're willing, we'd like to blot out what's happened, and let it be forgotten."

"I'm your man!"

"Good!" exclaimed Wharton. "And that means that your name goes down for the St. Jim's match."

"Right-ho!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Redwing. "That's jolly good news!"

"And there's room for Redwing, too," said Harry. "The list goes up to-day, Smithy; and I don't mind saying that I'm jolly glad your name's going to be in it!"

And the captain of the Remove went down to the Rag to post the list.

. . . . . .

The feud in the Remove was over.

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THE END.

(*You will all enjoy reading: "ALL THROUGH BUNTER!" a stirring long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., at Greyfriars!*)

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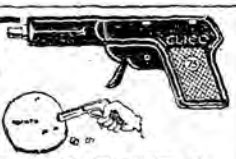

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Printed and published every Tuesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription rates: Inland and Abroad, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Sole agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd. Sole agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.—Saturday, June 29th, 1929.

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