FIVE LONG STORIES and Every One a THRILLER!

The POPULAR

Week Ending
Dec. 7th, 1929
No. 567
(New Series)

Every
Tuesday

2d.

"THE HOLD-UP!"

A FULL-OF-THRILLS TALE of the WEST, featuring the RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

THE GREATEST TALE OF THE WEST EVER WRITTEN!

The HOLD-UP!

BY RALPH REDWAY.

The Law has made the Rio Kid an outlaw again; its emissaries have driven him from his ranch to the lonely chaparrals; and the Kid, in his bitterness, vows that what they have made him he will be—an outlaw—a terror of the trails!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
On the Jack-Rabbit Trail!

"HOLD in your hosses!"

It was a quiet, drawling voice. There was no excitement in it—no hint of a threat. But the driver of the Jack-Rabbit stage pulled in his team so suddenly that the horses almost rolled back on their haunches.

"The Rio Kid!" he ejaculated.

He dragged on the reins as the horseman pushed out of the mesquite into the trail.

There was no need for the Kid to lift the long-barrelled Colt in the hand that hung at his side. The sight of the handsome, sunburnt, reckless face, in the shadow of the Stetson hat, with its circle of silver nuggets, was enough for the stage-driver. He might have chanced whipping his horses to a rush in dealing with any other outlaw in Texas. But he was not taking chances with the Rio Kid.

The Kid smiled sourly.

From the window of the vehicle two or three startled faces looked out. But no weapon was shown. The passengers in the stage did not hone for gunplay with the Kid.

"I see you know me, Ribbons!" said the Kid, as the driver brought the trampling horses to a standstill.

"I should smile!" answered Billy Fresh, the driver. "Say, I ain't giving you any trouble, Kid—not by a jugful!"

"I guess it'd be the last thing you'd do this side of Jordan, if you did," answered the Kid. "Tell them guys to light down and pony up the dust."

Billy Fresh eyed him curiously.

"Say, Kid, you holding up this hearse?" he asked.

"You've said it."

"It's sure a new break for you, Kid."

The Rio Kid shrugged his shoulders.

Without waiting to be bidden, the passengers were descending from the stage into the rough trail. Scared glances were cast towards the boy rider, sitting in the saddle of the grey mustang, his revolver held down by his side. They knew the name and fame of the Rio Kid, and they knew that that long-barrelled, walnut-butted gun was ready to spit fire and death with lightning swiftness.

"Say, Kid——" went on Billy Fresh.

"Aw, can it!" snapped the Kid. "This hyer is a new break for me, jest as you say. I allow it's the first hold-up I ever figured in, but it sure ain't going to be the last. They won't let me be anything but an outlaw, and it's me against all Texas! And I'm sure aiming to let all Texas know that they'd heap better have left me alone on the Lazy O Ranch."

The Kid's eyes flashed.

The boy outlaw was in a black and bitter mood, and that mood had lasted for days. It had lasted since he had ridden away from the Lazy O Ranch in the Packsaddle country, to avoid being rounded up by the Texas Rangers.

Wild as the Rio Kid's reputation was, wild as were the deeds laid to his charge, the Kid was at heart what he had always been—a cowpuncher born and bred, as in the old days on the Double-Bar Ranch at Frio. And the Kid had made an attempt to leave outlaw trails behind him—an attempt upon which fortune, at first, had seemed to smile.

But it was not to be. The Rio Kid was destined not to run his ranch—not to ride Side-Kicker on peaceful trails. Fate had been against him, and he had been hunted from his new home, driven from his hope of leading a peaceful life within the law. No man in Packsaddle could say that the Kid had wronged him; many had been proud to call themselves his friends; but the shadow of the past had fallen on him once more, blackening his fair prospects, and the Kid had had to ride.

He rode with a heavy and bitter heart. Wild tales were told of the Kid at every rodeo and cow-town; but the Kid, at least, knew that they were wild. Hold-ups and shootings, the deeds of others, were put down to the Kid. His name had grown almost into a legend on the banks of the Rio Grande. Fame had wronged him. But, in spite of what men had said of him, the Kid had remained what he always was, as straight-dealing a galoot as any in Texas, till now——

Now, as he rode once more an outlaw trail, a hunted man with a price on his head, after his attempt to throw the past behind him, the Kid's thoughts had taken a new line.

They had made him an outlaw again—they had driven him to the sierra and the chaparral, and the Kid, in his bitterness, swore that what they had made him he would be! If they would not have him for a friend they should have him for a foe, and they would learn how dangerous a foe. Outlaw, gunman, fire-bug, hunted for his life, why should he not live up to his reputation, and take the game as well as the name?

In that bitter mood the Kid rode the

(Copyright in the United States of America.)

Jack-Rabbit trail, for the first time, as what men called him—a fire-bug and a hold-up man. The die was cast. The Kid, at last, had become what he was called.

Sitting Side-Kicker in the trail, the Rio Kid watched the frightened passengers alight. His gun was ready, but it was not wanted. No man there was likely to burn powder with the Rio Kid.

"One—two—three," the Kid counted, as the passengers stepped out. "Put up your paws, you-'uns!"

They stood in a row in the trail, with their hands up. The Kid pushed his horse a little nearer.

"I guess you've got another passenger, Ribbons!" he said coolly.

"I guess not," said Ribbons.

"Can it!" said the Kid. "Jonas Sylvester, the boss of the Silver Star Ranch, got on this hearse at Injun Ford. I guess I'm wise to it, and I reckon Jonas has been selling cattle, and he's going back to Jack-Rabbit with a big wad. Tell him to hop out."

Billy Fresh grinned.

"You're too late, Kid."

"How come?" asked the Kid.

"Mister Sylvester ain't in this hyer hearse."

The Kid made a motion with his gun.

"You don't want to fool with me, Billy Fresh," he said warningly. "I'm after that hombre, and I guess I know he got on the hearse at the Ford. Say, you want this hyer shebang to get a new driver?"

"I'm telling you, Kid; you're too late."

"If that guy don't light down instanter, I'm sending hot lead through the hearse," said the Kid. "I ain't after that caboodle that's lining the trail. I want the boss of the Silver Star. Say, they've made me an outlaw agin, and I'm sure after big game. You get me?"

"I guess you can riddle the hearse if you want, Kid; but Mister Sylvester won't stop any of the lead," said the driver. "I'm telling you he ain't on the shebang now. You're too late, Kid. The hearse was stopped a mile out of Injun Ford by the Jadwin gang, and they've got him."

"Sho!" ejaculated the Kid.

He rode closer to the stage and peered in at the window The vehicle was empty. The three passengers, standing at the side of the trail with their hands up, were all it had contained. Those three passengers—a storekeeper, a bartender, and a bank clerk, of Jack-Rabbit—were hardly worth any hold-up man's attention. Jonas Sylvester, the wealthiest rancher in the section, was big game, and he was the Kid's game, now that the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande had taken to an outlaw trail in deadly earnest.

Billy Fresh grinned down at him.

The fate of his passenger, taken by force from the stage by a gang of desperadoes, did not worry Billy. To the stage-driver, passengers were merely goods that he carried at a fee. So long as his horses and himself were safe, Billy did not worry about the incidents of the trail. He grinned, as if at a good joke, as he looked down at the Kid. It seemed a rare jest to Billy Fresh that the Rio Kid should have held up the stage to go through Mister Sylvester, when Mister Sylvester had already fallen into the hands of a gang of hold-up men.

"Sho!" repeated the Kid. "Carry me home to die!"

Billy Fresh chuckled.

"Your more'n an hour too late, Kid," he said. "Them guys—three of them—held us up a mile outside the Ford. They was after Sylvester's roll, and they sure was mad when they found that he'd banked the money for the cattle at the Ford. Yes, sir. Mister Sylvester hadn't more'n ten dollars in his rags, and him the richest man in Jack-Rabbit. I'm telling you that they was horn mad."

"Sho!" said the Kid. "And what for did they take the guy out of the hearse? What was the good of the guy without his dust?"

The driver chuckled again.

"I guess the Jadwin gang know how to make him spill dollars," he said. "Mister Sylvester will have to buy his skin dear from that gang. Bill Jadwin will sure make him sweat dollars."

The Kid smiled grimly.

He could guess what the rich rancher's fate was likely to be in the grip of the most savage and lawless gang of desperadoes in the section. No torture known to Apache or Comanche would be spared to force plunder from him. Mister Sylvester, of the Silver Star Ranch, would have fared better at the hands of the Rio Kid.

Billy Fresh gathered up his reins.

"I guess I'm late for Jack-Rabbit, Kid," he said persuasively. "You going through them guys, say?"

The Kid made a gesture.

"I sure ain't picking crows," he said. "I stopped this hyer hearse for old Sylvester. I reckoned he'd have ten thousand dollars in his rags."

"That was what the Jadwin gang reckoned, I guess!" chuckled Billy. "And they was hoppin' mad! But I guess they'll sweat ten thousand dollars out of him afore he hits the Silver Star again, search me!"

He grinned at the Kid.

"You're sure too late, hombre," he said.

The Kid made no answer; he burst into a laugh. It was a ringing, good-humoured laugh. The Kid had a sense of humour. This was the first time he had followed an outlaw trail in earnest, and his intended prey had slipped through his fingers. The Kid was amused.

Deep in his heart, perhaps, the Kid was glad that it had happened so. It was passionate resentment, something like despair, that had led him to live, for once, up to his wild reputation. But Fate had intervened once more.

"Say, you ginks, you can sure hop into that hearse," said the Kid, with a gesture to the waiting passengers. "You ain't my game!"

The three passengers gladly took advantage of the permission. The Kid turned to Billy Fresh.

"You can beat it, Billy," he said curtly.

"Sure!" said Billy cheerfully.

The driver cracked his whip, and the stage rolled on along the trail towards the cow-town of Jack-Rabbit.

The Rio Kid, sitting motionless in the saddle of the grey mustang, watched it disappear. There was little in the handsome face to express his feelings; but deep down in his heart the Kid was glad that Fate had intervened, and that the hold-up had not been a success. He sat Side-Kicker and watched the stage as it disappeared, at last, in a cloud of dust in the far distance. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, the Kid turned his horse from the trail and rode into the mesquite.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Way of the Kid!

"YOU pesky gink!" growled the Rio Kid.

He was speaking to himself.

There was a cloud on the Kid's brow a glint in his eyes. He was angry—angry with himself, irritated by the thoughts that he drove from his mind and that would return.

From the Jack-Rabbit stage-trail the boy outlaw had ridden away through the mesquite at a gallop. But the gallop slackened down to a loping trot, the trot to a walk.

"You dog-goned geck!" growled the Kid.

Side-Kicker, once or twice, twined round his glossy neck, graceful as a swan's, and looked at his master. The horse felt the rider's hesitation and indecision. It was unusual for the Kid to be irresolute; but he was irresolute now, and the mustang was aware of it.

More and more slowly the Kid rode, as if checked by some power outside his own will.

He drew the mustang to a halt at last, and Side-Kicker lowered his head and began to crop the herbage. The Kid, sitting idle in the saddle, communed with himself angrily.

"If you ain't the prize boob, Kid Carfax!" he said. "If you ain't the world's biggest bonehead, carry me home to die! Ain't you hit enough trouble, you gol-darned gink, without horning into another guy's? Say!"

But it was useless for the Kid to argue. He knew what he was going to do all the while he argued.

Rancher Sylvester, of Jack-Rabbit, had been his game. He had expected to find the rich rancher in the Jack-Rabbit stage. From cover on the trail, he had seen the stage drive out of Indian Ford, with the Silver Star rancher in it; and he had cut across country to waylay the stage half-way to Jack-Rabbit. He was glad that he had failed, he admitted that now. Driven to desperation by the persecutions of Fate, hunted by innumerable enemies, the Kid had figured that he was going to be what they made him. But there was nothing to it, he was not a hold-up man. Even had Rancher Sylvester been on the stage, he doubted now whether he would have lifted the rancher's wad. There was nothing to it, and the Kid realised that. And he had ridden away, realising that; but——

But, in spite of himself, his thoughts lingered on the rancher, a prisoner in the hands of the Jadwin gang.

The Kid knew the reputation of the Jadwins. Three brothers, the hardest cases in Texas; savage, lawless, ferocious; wanted for a dozen murders and robberies. He could have pitied even a deadly enemy who had fallen into the hands of the Jadwin gang. And Jonas Sylvester was no enemy. He was a fat old rancher, popular in the section, well liked by his outfit, and he had a wife and daughter at home at the ranch. The wife and the daughter the Kid had never seen, but his thoughts went to them now.

For he knew what was going to happen to the boss of the Silver Star. With such a prize in their hands, the Jadwin gang would not let him off lightly. They had kidnapped him from the stage-coach for what he was worth, and they would reckon that the rich rancher was worth a fortune to them. Somewhere deep in the trackless chaparral, the prisoner would remain in the hands of the Jadwins till he had paid for his liberty. He was said to be an obstinate man—a man of iron

will, and if that was the case, the Jadwins would not find it easy to wring dollars from him. But the Kid knew the methods they would employ to break down Sylvester's resistance. It was not the first time the Jadwins had played that game. A rope twisted round his neck, or his feet shoved into a camp-fire—the Kid did not like to think of it. And if he did not yield to their demands—death!

Surely it was no business of the Kid's. He told himself angrily and savagely that it was no business of his. The three Jadwins were deadly gunmen. Bill, the eldest and leader, reputed one of the deadliest shots in Texas; Sam and Mike Jadwin, both desperadoes, both dangerous foes. It was no business of the Kid's to come into conflict with that savage gang, for the sake of a man he hardly knew even by sight—a man he had aimed to hold up on the trail!

It was the business of the sheriffs who hunted the Kid—of the Rangers who had hunted the Kid from the Lazy O. They were the guys whose business it was to track down the Jadwins and rescue their victim. The Kid's business was to ride, while there was time to ride—to get out of the Jack-Rabbit country, out of the danger of being rounded up by the men who would soon be searching for Rancher Sylvester and the Jadwins.

That was the Kid's business, and he was not going to do it. He knew what he was going to do. The Kid's old weakness had cropped up again. He was going to horn into trouble that was not his. He had ridden the Jack-Rabbit trail to hold up Rancher Sylvester, and he was going to risk his life to save the man from the outlaws, for the sake of the wife and daughter who would be waiting, with anxious hearts, at the ranch. That was what the Kid was going to do. A strange enough outcome of his first essay as a hold-up man on the trails.

Long the Kid sat idle in the saddle, debating the matter in his mind, yet knowing all the time how the debate would end. He swung Side-Kicker into motion again at last, wheeling round and riding back the way he had come.

"It's you that's the prize gink, Kid Carfax," he said bitterly, as he rode back to the Jack-Rabbit trail. "Say, wouldn't this guy Sylvester put the riata round your pesky neck as soon as the next man? He sure would! Why can't you leave him to what's coming to him, you gol-darned geck? Say!"

There was no answer to that question; only the Kid knew that he was not going to leave Jonas Sylvester to what was coming to him.

He reached the open trail, and rode in the direction of Indian Ford. A mile out of Indian Ford, Billy Fresh had said, the rancher had been taken from the stage. It was there that the Kid's trail began.

Side-Kicker's swift hoofs covered the ground rapidly. The Kid's keen eyes picked up the spot when he reached it. He did not trouble to dismount. He read the sign where the stage had halted, and where three horsemen had trampled the trail. He picked up the prints of the boots, where Jonas Sylvester had walked into the chaparral, a prisoner in the hands of the three riders.

Not a sign escaped the lynx eyes of the Rio Kid. There were few men in Texas so keen at reading sign. It was a game at which the Kid could beat Apache or Comanche. But he knew that difficulties would begin later. The Jadwins would look for pursuit, though not by the Rio Kid; they would blind their trail the best they could. The whole section would be up in arms when the news spread of the kidnapping of the rancher. It would not be easy to track them down; but the Kid was the man to do it, if any man could. From the saddle, the Kid picked up sign enough to guide him, and he was about to ride into the chaparral, when he caught the sound of distant hoofbeats.

He looked along the stage-trail towards Jack-Rabbit, and smiled.

Far in the distance, from the direction of the cow-town, came that thunder of hoofs, and the Kid had a glimpse of bobbing Stetson hats.

Men were riding from Jack-Rabbit already. Billy Fresh had driven in with two startling items of news for the cow-town—that Rancher Sylvester had been kidnapped by the Jadwins, and that the Rio Kid had held up the stage. The Kid smiled grimly. The men who were riding out of Jack-Rabbit were, doubtless, riding to the rancher's rescue; but if they came on the Rio Kid, he would be their game. They were on the same quest as himself, but there would be gun-play if they fell in with him. He was taking the trail with foes before and foes behind.

The Kid shrugged his shoulders, and turned Side-Kicker into the thickets.

Through the tangled chaparral the trail left by the Jadwins was plain enough for a distance. The Kid followed it at a trot. The stage-trail disappeared behind him; the hoofbeats of the Jack-Rabbit outfit died away in silence. But they were coming on; they would follow where the Kid was following—so long as there was sign to lead them. But the Kid figured that that would not be long, and he gave little thought to the foes behind him as he pushed on through the chaparral.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Trail!

"SHUCKS!" grunted the Kid.

More than a mile he had followed the Jadwin trail through tangled thickets and scrubs. For a time there had been the footprints of the man who walked among those of the three horses. But after a time those footprints vanished, and the Kid figured that the prisoner had been taken up behind one of the riders. Indeed, the Kid's unfailing eyes could pick out which of the horsemen had lifted the rancher, for the deeper tracks of the animal told of the double weight. Three hours at least had elapsed since the Jadwins had ridden that way, but the trail was more than fresh enough for the Kid—it was fresh enough for any plainsman—and he knew that the Jack-Rabbit outfit would be following it. But now the Kid had come to a wide stretch of stony ground, thick with alkali dust blown in the wind, and he dismounted from the mustang to search for sign.

He had expected something of the kind. He knew that the Jadwins would not leave a trail that any galoot in Texas could follow with his eyes shut. So far, a tenderfoot could have followed them, but from now on the keenest Apache might have been beaten.

Beyond the alkali plain lay a range of low hills. Somewhere in the hills the Jadwins had taken refuge with their prisoner, but the alkali dust told no tale. The tracks of the Kid's own mustang were obliterated almost as soon as they were made by the wind that tossed the dust in clouds ever shifting. If the Kid was able to keep on it would call for all his skill, and he reckoned that the Jack-Rabbit outfit would be beaten when they reached that spot.

It seemed, for a little time, that the Kid himself would be beaten. He tried to and fro, and long minutes passed; and a sound came from the dim chaparral behind him that told of horsemen approaching. The Jack-Rabbit outfit were coming on through the scrubs, and they would come on the Kid if he lingered there.

But it was not long that the Kid lingered.

Few eyes would have picked up the sign that guided the Rio Kid onward. But anything that was visible to an eagle's eye was visible to the Kid's. One broken twig in a sage-bush was enough, and the Kid rode forward at a gallop, the shifting alkali dust behind him washing out his trail as fast as it was made.

The direction was all he wanted, and that almost indistinguishable sign had told him. The Jadwins had turned at a sharp angle from their former course, aiming to cross the alkali plain diagonally, though a pursuer would naturally have figured that they had struck right across it to the refuge of the hills.

The Kid rode at a gallop, and the inequalities of the plain soon hid him from the eyes of the Jack-Rabbit outfit when they emerged from the chaparral at the spot he had left behind.

The Kid reckoned that at that spot they would be beaten, and he looked for no further following.

It was the task ahead that occupied his thoughts.

The Jadwin trail, if the Kid had picked it up correctly, lay almost parallel with the line of the hills. But at some point they would turn off to strike into the hills, and if the Kid missed that point he might ride on and leave what he sought behind him.

He slackened speed, scanning the ground, and at last dismounted and proceeded on foot, the patient mustang following him.

Overhead, the blazing sun of Texas poured down heat; the plain reflected the glare. But the Kid did not heed dust and heat. For mile on mile the alkali plain lay round him, dotted with dusty, scrubby sage, and here and there a gaunt cactus. And it was the broken blade of a yucca that told the Kid that he was still on the right trail; and later, a single hoofprint that the dust had not obliterated. An outcrop of stone, thick with dust, sheltered that single sign from the wind, and preserved it for the Kid's eyes, which gleamed as he scanned it.

"I guess them Jack-Rabbit guys won't pick up a trail like this, a whole lot!" chuckled the Kid.

He looked back.

There was no sign of horsemen on the plain. The men from Jack-Rabbit had been beaten, as the Kid expected, and as the Jadwins certainly had calculated. The Kid pictured them hunting for a sign that they would never find, sweating and cursing; he laughed at the mental picture. If the Jadwins and their prisoner were found it would not be by the outfit that had ridden out of Jack-Rabbit to search for them.

The Kid pressed on.

He had forgotten all his doubts and hesitation now—forgotten that he was horning into another man's trouble that did not concern him—in his keen interest in picking up the most difficult trail he had ever followed.

He picked it up, sign by sign and inch by inch. From that point the Jadwins had been less wary and watchful, certain that they had left no sign behind that any but a magician could have followed. Two trackless miles—trackless to any but the Rio Kid—lay behind the gang,

and they had felt safe. From now onward the Kid's hard task was easier. He picked up trampled sage, a burnt match, and a cigar stump—infinitesimal objects in the rolling plain, but not too infinitesimal for the eyes that found them. Where the gang had turned, at last, towards the line of the hills, the Kid turned, too; and now he remounted Side-Kicker, and rode.

Black and barren lay the arid hills before him, and in the rugged line was a narrow opening—a dark, rocky gulch, by way of which, if the Kid's figuring was not out, the Jadwins had ridden into the hills. The Kid's eyes were not seeking sign now; they watched the dark hills before him as he rode, and his gun was very near his hand.

Whether the Jadwins had ridden deep into the hills, or whether they were camped in that gulch, he could not tell yet; but he knew that if he was sighted a shot would be his first warning of it. His heart did not beat faster, but his eye was keener than ever as he rode towards the dark opening of the gulch.

He reached it at last, and rode into the opening—a split in high rocks, scarce six yards wide, rugged and precipitous. It wound away into the mass of the hills, and the eye could not follow its windings more than a score of yards ahead.

The Kid dismounted again.

Followed by his mustang, gun in hand, the Kid tramped up the rugged, rocky floor of the gulch. Suddenly, from the silence of the hills, came a sound to his ears; and the Kid halted, breathing hard, and listened. It was a cry that had reached him—the cry of a man in pain. It was repeated, ringing eerily down the rocky gulch.

The Kid's eyes glittered.

He made a sign to Side-Kicker, and the mustang halted.

The Kid moved on—silent now as a panther stealing on his prey.

Again came the cry—and again. It guided the Kid, if he had needed guiding. With his gun gripped in his hand, finger on trigger, the Rio Kid crept on. And as he came round the base of a great cliff, and a startling scene burst upon his eyes, he knew that he had come to the end of the trail.

— —

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Sharp Shooting!

"DOG-GONE you, hombre! You reckon you want more?"

It was a deep, gruff, savage voice.

Bill Jadwin, the leader of the outlaw gang, stared down grimly at the bound man who lay at his feet.

On either side of Rancher Sylvester knelt Sam and Mike Jadwin. The boss of the Silver Star Ranch lay helpless, bound hand and foot with raw hide ropes. His face was white and tortured. On his broad chest lay a huge mass of rugged granite, held in position by the two ruffians who knelt. Its weight almost crushed the hapless man stretched beneath it.

"You want more, dog-gone you?" growled Bill Jadwin.

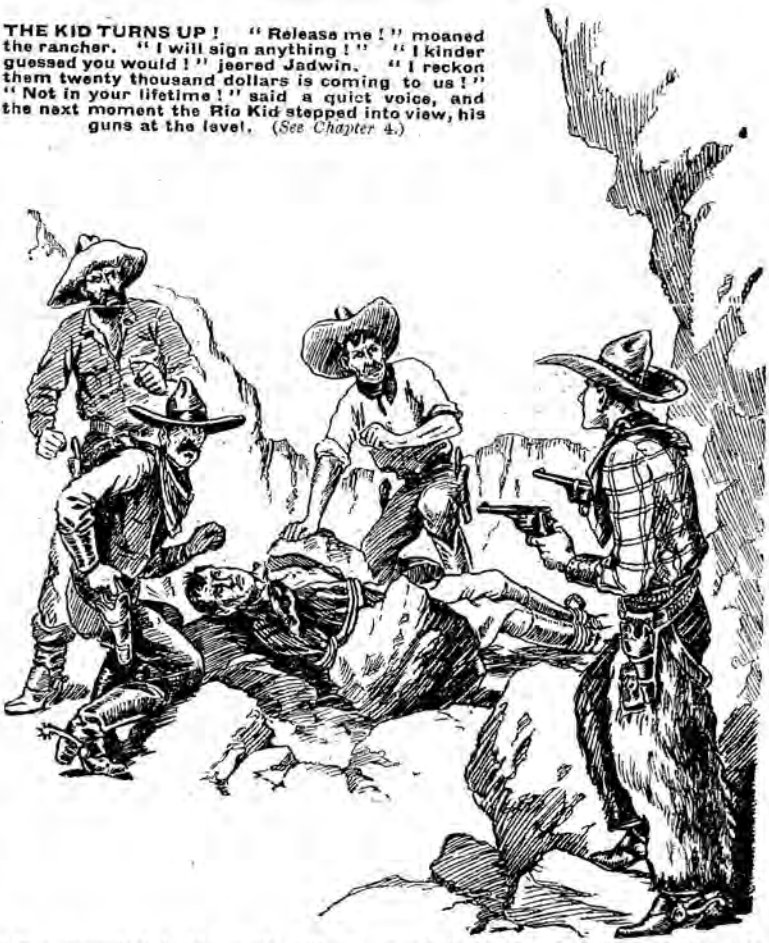
A faint cry was the only answer.

The ruffian uttered an oath.

"Say, Mister Sylvester, I reckon you know where you are," he snarled. "You're with the Jadwins. And I guess you've heard of their reputation. You reckon you can beat us to it, when we've got you by the short hairs, jest where we want you—say?"

"I guess the hombre wants some more," chuckled Sam Jadwin. "You jest heave another rock on him."

The rancher panted.



THE KID TURNS UP! "Release me!" moaned the rancher. "I will sign anything!" "I kinder guessed you would!" jeered Jadwin. "I reckon them twenty thousand dollars is coming to us!" "Not in your lifetime!" said a quiet voice, and the next moment the Rio Kid stepped into view, his guns at the level. (*See Chapter 4.*)

"You scoundrels! My outfit will get you, and hang you for this."

Bill Jadwin gave a savage laugh.

"I guess your outfit won't find us in these hills," he said. "You had your eyes open the way we came. You sure saw the trail blanketed. You figure that any guy on the Silver Star Ranch will ever pick up sign enough to follow us home?"

The rancher groaned.

"You've got it coming to you," snarled Bill Jadwin. "We reckoned we'd lift off'n you the wad you got at Injun Ford, selling cattle; and there was nothing to that. But we got you."

"We sure did, feller," chuckled Mike Jadwin.

"I guess it was ten thousand dollars," said Bill Jadwin. "But I sure reckon it's going to touch you for twenty thousand to get clear of this, Jonas Sylvester. You get me? You got to fix up the paper fair an' square, and stay here with us, while Mike goes to collect on it. And if the dollars ain't paid on the nail, and anything happens to Mike, you want to be sorry for yourself, for you'll burn at the stake like you was with the Apaches in the Staked Plain. You get me, durn you?"

There was no mistaking the ruffian's savage earnestness. But the only reply from the rancher was a cry of pain. The heavy rock crushed him to the earth with its weight.

"Heave on another donick, Bill," exclaimed Mike Jadwin impatiently. "The guy will sure talk turkey then."

"Never!" panted the rancher. "You may kill me, but I will never sign the draft! You shall never touch a cent of mine!"

"I guess we'll see about that," snarled Bill Jadwin; and he grasped a heavy boulder, and placed it on top of the great mass that already crushed the hapless man.

A low moan burst from the rancher.

"I guess that will do the trick," grinned Sam Jadwin. "Say, hombre, you want to have some hoss sense! I reckon your bones will sure begin to crack."

The rancher moaned again. The pain was intolerable. And the obstinate doggedness died out of his face.

"Release me!" His voice was a faint moan. "I will sign."

Bill Jadwin laughed hoarsely.

"I kinder guessed you would," he jeered. "Say, you gink, you've sure been wasting a whole lot of time. I reckon them twenty thousand dollars is coming to us."

"Not in your lifetime," said a quiet voice.

The three ruffians spun round at the voice, with startled oaths. The boulders piled on the rancher, no longer held in position, rolled off with a crash, and the tortured man breathed again.

The three outlaws grasped their weapons as they turned, and the Rio Kid rapped out sharply.

"Put 'em up!"

In amazement and rage the Jadwin gang stared at him. Suddenly, as if he had fallen from the skies, the Rio Kid had appeared on the scene, and the Jadwins could scarcely believe their

eyes as they stared at him. A gun was in either hand of the Kid as he stood scarce a dozen feet away.

The Kid smiled over the levelled barrels at their enraged faces.

"I guess you don't collect them dollars, a whole lot, fellers," he drawled. "I surely guess not. Keep them guns down, or you get what's coming to you—sudden."

"The Rio Kid!" breathed Bill Jadwin.

"I guess you're wise to me," smiled the Kid.

The bound man on the earth turned his head, gazing at the Kid.

"Help me!" he panted. "Save me—save me from those demons! I will reward you! Any reward you name!"

"Can it!" interrupted the Kid. He spoke to the rancher, but his eyes were eagle-like on the three glaring outlaws. "I guess I ain't after your dollars, Mister Sylvester."

"The Rio Kid," repeated Bill Jadwin, his grasp convulsive on the gun he dared not raise. "You dog-goned fire-bug, what you horning into this game for? You that's wanted by a dozen sheriffs—you that's hunted by the Texas Rangers! Let up, you gink, and stand pat, I'm telling you!"

"Not by a jugful!" answered the Kid cheerily. "I guess I'm here to get that hombre away from you, feller."

"What durn business is it of yourn?" roared Bill Jadwin. "You an outlaw, same as this gang——"

"You've said it," agreed the Kid. "I guess Texas won't let me be nothing but a pesky outlaw. And that goes! But not the same as you, Bill Jadwin, I reckon. Not in your lifetime, hombre. But I guess I didn't hop into this outfit to chew the rag. Put up your hands!"

The three ruffians hesitated. Well they knew the shooting of the Rio Kid; and his two Colts bore full upon them. But they were three to one, and hardy desperadoes; and burning with rage at the thought of being robbed of their prey. A quick glance was exchanged among the three.

"Don't!" said the Kid warningly.

"I guess we'll take you into the riffle, Kid," said Bill Jadwin hoarsely. "Stand in with us."

"Forget it!"

With a fierce curse Bill Jadwin lifted his gun-arm, and his brothers acted as promptly.

Crack-ack!

Both the Kid's guns roared instantly. Bill Jadwin spun over backwards with a bullet in his heart. And Sam Jadwin crumpled where he stood, and dropped, and never stirred again. Mike Jadwin's hands flew above his head, and he yelled:

"Let up, Kid! Let up!"

The Kid eyed him grimly.

"I guess you wasn't any too soon putting up them paws!" he snapped. "I reckon you can live, you dog-goned coyote! Keep 'em up!"

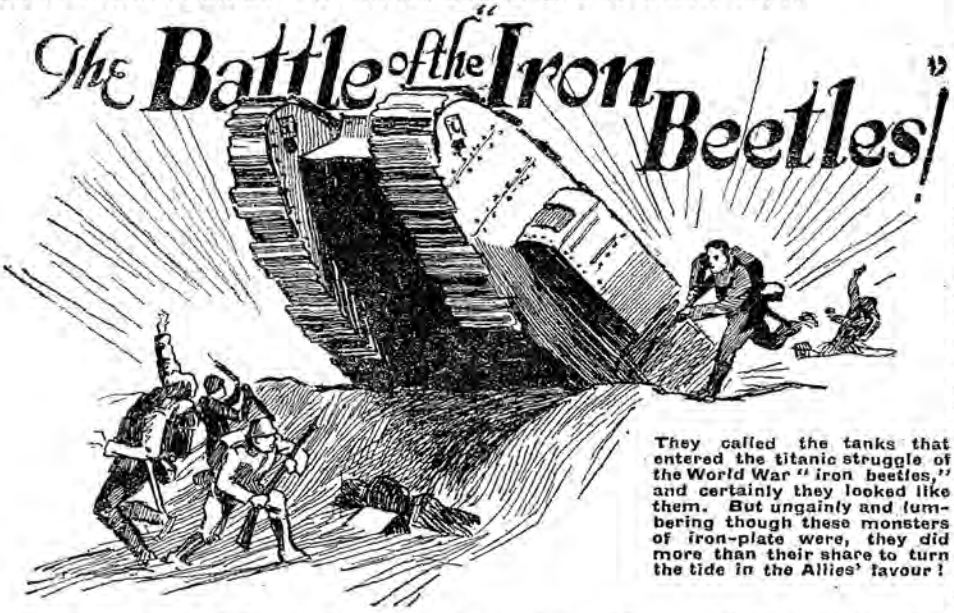
The Kid advanced and disarmed the ruffian, who eyed him with malevolent hate.

"Git on your cayuse, an' beat it,"

(*Continued on page* 12.)

OUR POPULAR SERIES—STIRRING DEEDS OF THE GREAT WAR!

The Battle of the "Iron Beetles!"



They called the tanks that entered the titanic struggle of the World War "iron beetles," and certainly they looked like them. But ungainly and lumbering though these monsters of iron-plate were, they did more than their share to turn the tide in the Allies' favour!

Fortresses on wheels! Such are the Tanks of our Army to-day. When, during the hectic days of the Great War, when first they were sprung on the enemy as a staggering surprise they were just daring experiments. Ungainly, lumbering monsters of armour-plate, with men inside and the muzzles of guns poking viciously out, with "caterpillar tracks" that they carried with them and wound up and unwound as they lurched along; no wonder the Germans' hair stood on end when first these fortresses heaved into battle.

The experiments proved amazingly successful. No rumours of them had reached the enemy's ears.

The great battle was to open on November 20th, 1917—the Battle of Cambrai. As dawn broke the heavens reverberated to the incredible crashes of enormous British guns. The artillery were opening "the fair"! Deep down in the immense and intricate tunnels of the Hindenburg Line the Germans were wondering what was afoot.

In front of them was barbed wire by the thousand ton. No bombardment of British heavy artillery could have swept away the vicious series of entanglements—so what had they in the Hindenburg Line to fear?

The answer was—Tanks! It was a ten mile front over which this tremendous battle for Cambrai was to wage. And that meant thousands upon thousands of troops. And those troops were coming on, across shell-pitted No Man's Land.

But what were those ludicrous shapes of metal lumbering and waddling in front of the Tommies? There they were—right on top of those masses of barbed wire. Now they were nosing into it, and in all directions that barbed wire, that had stood almost untouched by shell-fire for many months, was breaking like strands of cotton!

And out of the gun-muzzles that poked from the Tanks' sides poured endless streams of bullets; clouds of them that riddled everyone and everything in the path.

As the Tanks cleared broad paths, so the Infantry followed through. No longer was the enemy secure from the bayonet point of the British. Nothing could stand before them, as the Tanks lurched on and made torn and perilous roads for the eager feet of the attackers. And behind the Infantry came—what? British Cavalry! Cavalry that had been impatiently kicking its heels in impotent idleness. Horses that had been straining *at the bit* for months and months. Men who had been swinging keen-edged sabres for months and months, but only in imagination, for this had been, up to now, a war of *Infantry and Artillery and Aircraft only.* Our Cavalry had not been called upon.

Now that the Tanks were having it all their own way the restless Cavalry were getting a look-in. After the Tommies went the mounted men, now swinging their heavy sabres in deadly reality. At the trot they went, clearing up the enemy villages as the Tanks and Infantry pushed the German defences farther and farther back.

Tanks were now being hit by heavy shells. The armour plate fortresses were being reduced in number. But those whose machinery remained in workable condition went on and on—as inevitable and undodgable as Father Time himself!

There was also a procession in the opposite direction—German prisoners by the hundred moving back to the British wire "cages" prepared in readiness for them.

Dawn had become mid day, and the rearward procession of dejected prisoners was *continuing unbroken.* Mid day became dusk, and still the advance of Tanks, Infantry, Cavalry, and Artillery went on. And always prisoners were being shepherded back.

Before night fell 8,000 of the enemy were hemmed in behind our wire compounds. The first and second fighting lines of the vaunted German hosts had fallen to us. It was a great and famous victory, and a few hours later all Britain knew of it. The *church bells at home were ringing* a wild, glad peal. The Hindenburg Line was "done"—and the Tanks had helped to do it!

And what of those men who fought in the Tanks—who wedged themselves into what might easily have proved to be their metal coffins? Casualties were vast, but always that must be the price of victory. The "Iron Beetles" had won the day.

"Yarooh!" roared Trimble. "Keep him off! I never did it! I wasn't—— Help! Rescue! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Gwooogh! Oh deah!"

Blake dragged up the breathless Gussy. A crowd of fellows gathered round. Arthur Augustus groped for his eyeglass and jammed it into his eye.

"I've got him, you chaps!" he gasped. "Don't let him get away!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther chuckled. Evidently D'Arcy the Detective was still on the trail of the hapless Trimble. Baggy, guilty of many things, was undoubtedly innocent on this occasion; but the St. Jim's detective was not to be denied.

"I—I say——" howled Trimble.

"What's this game?" demanded Cardew.

"Twimble is the guiltay partay!" explained Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "Havin' fixed it on him, you know, I was goin' to make him own up before all the fellows—and he has been dodgin' me up and down and wound about——"

"What has he done?" asked Levison of the Fourth.

"He's the man!"

"What man?" shrieked Blake.

"The man that bagged Mr. Selby's banknote and hid it, you know! I have completed the case!" said Detective D'Arcy, with dignity.

Levison stared blankly. There was a roar of laughter from the other fellows.

"Weally, you fellows——"

"So Trimble's the jolly old criminal, is he?" chuckled Ralph Reckness Cardew. "This is rich—really rich! How do you make it out, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wasn't—I didn't—I never——" babbled Trimble.

"Stop him!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

Baggy Trimble was bolting for the door. But the juniors did not stop him; they opened to let him pass. Arthur Augustus rushed after him.

"Stop, you wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crash!

Baggy Trimble reached the doorway. But he got no farther; for just as he was tearing through, the stalwart figure of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, appeared there from the corridor.

There was a terrific collision.

Baggy Trimble yelled and sat down. Mr. Railton staggered against the door, gasping.

"Why, what—what—what——" he stuttered.

"Bai Jove!"

"Trimble! How dare you rush into me like that!" thundered the Housemaster.

"Ow-wow! That beast D'Arcy was after me!" howled Trimble. "I never did it! I never touched old Selby's banknote—yaroooh!"

"What! D'Arcy! Have you accused Trimble?"

"I did not mean to weport it to you, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "But as Twimble has mentioned the mattah, I have to inform you, sir, that I have investigated the case and pwoved beyond doubt that it was Twimble who played a jape with Mr. Selby's banknote!"

"You absurd boy!"

"Eh?"

"Silence! My boys," said Mr. Railton, looking round, "I came here to make a statement, which I desire to be known to the whole House, on this very subject. You all know that some boy picked up Mr. Selby's banknote, and kept it back for a time, and restored it in an anonymous manner. The foolish boy who played this foolish trick has now admitted it."

"Oh!"

Levison's face brightened. Cardew smiled.

"It was Racke of the Shell," went on Mr. Railton. "He came to my study of his own accord and confessed to having played that foolish trick."

"Racke!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"As Racke made a voluntary confession," said Mr. Railton, "I have not punished him; I think that the trouble he has caused will be a warning to him in the future. The matter is now quite cleared up. That is all."

And the Housemaster walked away, leaving the crowded room in a buzz.

"It was decent of Racke to own up," remarked Tom Merry.

"Wasn't it?" smiled Cardew.

Levison of the Fourth looked very bright. He smiled cheerily as he met his minor's eyes.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face was a study. His aristocratic cheeks were very pink. Even D'Arcy the Detective realised now that there was a screw loose somewhere in his masterly chain of reasoning.

Baggy Trimble chortled.

"What have you got to say now, D'Arcy?" he hooted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus had nothing to say. He faded out of the Common-room, to hide his blushes in the seclusion of Study No. 6. It was likely to be a long time before Arthur Augustus again exercised his wonderful gifts as a detective!

But everyone else was satisfied; even Aubrey Racke was kindly looked upon for having spoken up at last and cleared the last vestige of suspicion from Levison minor. The unfortunate affair of Mr. Selby's banknote was done with at last—though that happy conclusion was not due to D'Arcy the 'Tec!

THE END.

(*"CATCHING A TARTAR!" is the title of next week's topping long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.*)

"THE HOLD-UP!"

(*Continued from page 6.*)

said the Kid briefly, when he had searched Mike for weapons. "Light out, you durn scallawag, afore I change my mind and send you after the other ginks! You get me?"

There was a crash of hoofs as Mike Jadwin threw himself on his horse and galloped down the gulch. He turned in the saddle to shake a clenched fist at the Kid, and yell out a threat at which the Kid smiled contemptuously, and then he vanished from sight, and the galloping hoofs died away in the distance.

The Kid turned to the rancher.

A few slashes of his bowie knife, and the boss of the Silver Star was free. The Kid helped him up, and the rancher sat gasping on the rock that had so lately crushed him to the earth.

The Kid went to the two remaining tethered horses, cast one loose and saddled the other and led it to the rancher.

"I guess you can borrow this cayuse," he said. "Say, Mister Sylvester, they'll sure be powerful anxious about you at the Silver Star, and you want to hit the trail pronto."

Sylvester rose from the boulder. His eyes were strangely on his rescuer.

"You're the Rio Kid, same as that hombre said?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"The outlaw of the Rio Grande?"

"You've said it."

"And you've saved me from those fiends," muttered the rancher. "Say, this sure gets my goat! They won't believe this in Jack-Rabbit."

The Kid laughed.

"They'd sure believe you a whole lot, if you told them that the Rio Kid had held you up for your roll," he said.

"They sure would," said Sylvester. "Outlaw and fire-bug, whatever you are, you've saved me, and you've got a friend for life if you want one, Kid."

"Forget it," said the Kid lightly. "I guess I horned into this rookus jest because I never could mind my own business, feller. Get on that cayuse, and hit the trail."

The Kid called to Side-Kicker and mounted, and rode down the gulch with the rescued rancher. They rode in silence. Far away on the alkali plain a horsemen was vanishing in the dusty distance, and the rancher cast a glance for a moment after Mike Jadwin.

"You've made a bad enemy there, Kid," he said.

The Kid shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I've made a whole heap already, and one more won't worry me any," he answered carelessly. "This way, Mister Sylvester. I guess you'll be meeting up with your friends soon. There's an outfit from Jack-Rabbit in the chaparral, and I allow they're hunting for you."

They rode on in silence across the alkali plain towards the chaparral that bordered the Jack-Rabbit trail. On the edge of the dark green chaparral horsemen were seen, at last, moving to and fro on the plain, and the Kid grinned. The Jack-Rabbit outfit were still there trying to pick up the Jadwin trail in the alkali dust. But the horsemen turned their heads, and bunched together, and there was a shout as the two approaching riders were seen on the plain.

The Kid pulled in his mustang.

"I guess you hit it alone from here, Mister Sylvester," he said. "It sure would not be healthy for me to strike that bunch."

The rancher glanced at the distant horsemen now approaching them, and turned to the Kid again.

"They're my friends," he said. "Ride with me, Kid, and I'll answer for your safety."

"Not by a hatful," grinned the Kid. "Say, Mister Sylvester, them guys are hunting you, and, likewise, they're hunting a galoot who held up the Jack-Rabbit stage this morning after your wad, thinking you was aboard."

"And that was——"

"This hombre," said the Kid, laughing.

"Search me!" said the rancher, in amazement.

The Kid raised his Stetson.

"Adios, hombre!" he called out lightly; and, with a touch of the spur, Side-Kicker leaped into speed, and the Kid galloped away.

"Kid!" called out the rancher; but there was no answer, and Sylvester rode on to join his friends.

Far in the distance a little cloud of alkali dust marked the way of the Rio Kid. It died down, and the Kid was seen no more.

THE END.

(*Christmas with the Rio Kid. See next week's roaring long tale of this daredevil outlaw, entitled: "THE TRAIL IN THE SNOW!"*)