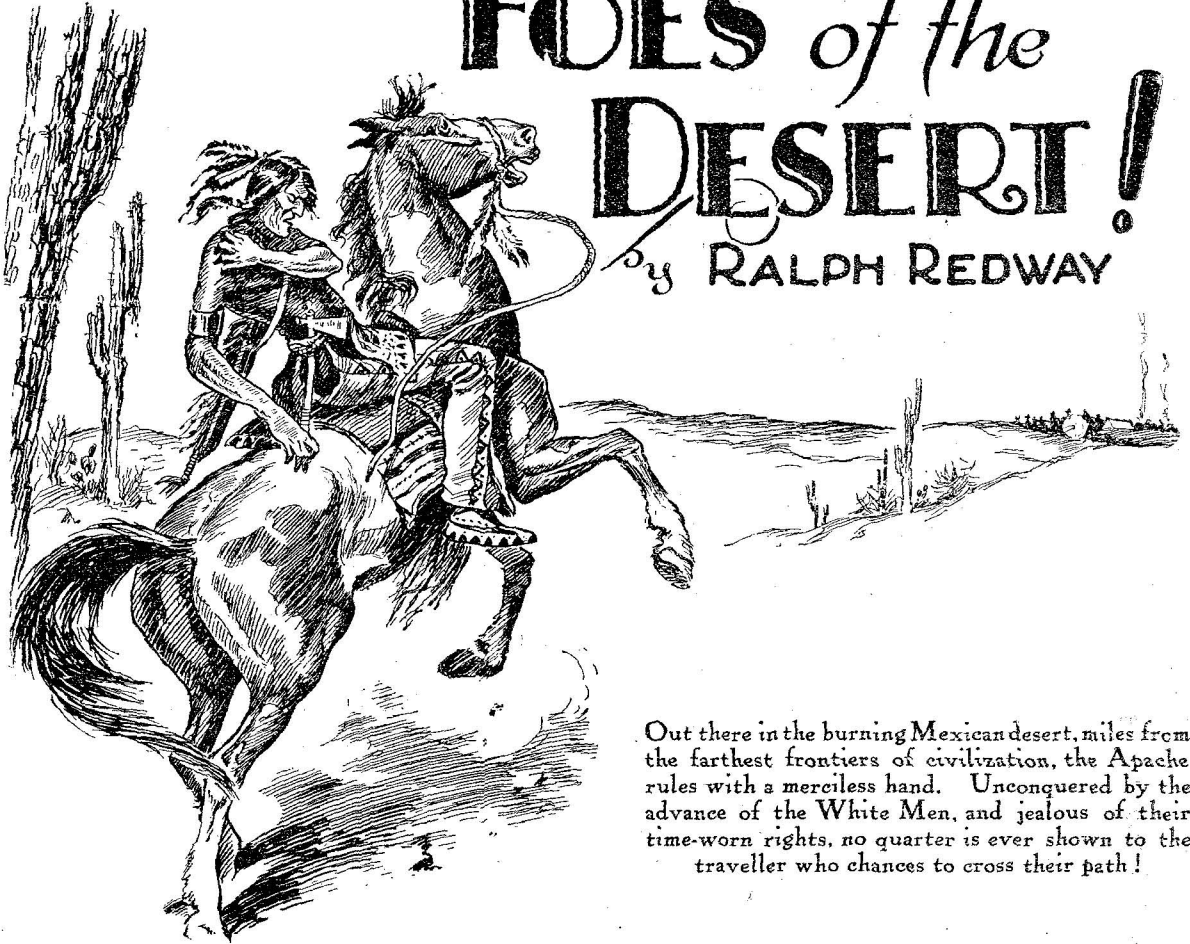


FOES of the DESERT!

by RALPH REDWAY



Out there in the burning Mexican desert, miles from the farthest frontiers of civilization, the Apache rules with a merciless hand. Unconquered by the advance of the White Men, and jealous of their time-worn rights, no quarter is ever shown to the traveller who chances to cross their path!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Apache!

INJUNS!" growled the Rio Kid. Dawn was breaking on the Mexican desert.

On the edge of a rocky arroyo, at the bottom of which a shallow stream trickled, the camp was pitched.

Round the camp, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the desert of Sonora; barren plains, dotted with scrubby sage and gaunt cactus and yucca, rived here and there by stony arroyos and deep barrancas.

Exactly where he was the Rio Kid could not have said; only that he was somewhere in the heart of the trackless desert.

For three days, since the Kid had joined Don Alvaro Alvarodo's bunch, the party had trailed into the desert.

Whether Alvarado had any special destination the Kid did not know; but he figured that the Mexican was simply trying to lose himself in the barren desert, out of the reach of pursuit.

With the Mexican bunch the Kid rode through the burning days, and camped in the chilly nights. Far from the farthest frontiers of civilization the bunch had lost themselves in the barren waste. It was not likely that the alcalde of Pajito, if he was on the trail, would ever trail them down.

Stony flats and sandy plains bore little or no sign for a tracker to follow. But if there was now little danger of

pursuit, there were other dangers, for which the Kid had kept a keen eye open.

As the sun rose over the desert and the Mexicans turned out of their serapes and busied themselves about the camp, the Kid stood watching the plains at a distant spot, where a bunch of tall cactus stood against the sky.

It was not only the cactus that the Kid saw. Something was stirring there.

"What do you see, *senorito*?"

Alvaro Alvarado joined the Kid, coming out of the camp. The Kid's fixed gaze at the distant cactus clump had drawn his attention.

"Injuns!" said the Kid briefly.

Don Alvaro followed his gaze keenly. He nodded. Almost hidden by the cactus, but not quite, was the figure of a horseman, halted, and watching the Mexican camp from the distance. The coppery face, the straggling feathers in the matted black hair, the tattered blanket, told that the rider was a Redskin.

"Only one of the *picaros*," said Alvarado carelessly.

The Kid grunted.

"I guess this hyer desert is as full of them, as a Mexican dog is of fleas!" he answered gruffly. "That guy is a scout, and he's found us. I reckon the whole family ain't far off."

"A mob of desert thieves," said the Mexican, shrugging his shoulders. "They will not give us much trouble."

"I guess they ain't what they was in the old days, when the war-trail ran to

the gates of Arispe," said the Kid. "But I reckon they'll give you all the trouble you want, feller, and a few over. Why, this outfit is worth a fortune to them Apaches. I guess the hosses alone would bring down on us every thief in the desert, if they knew we was here. We ain't less than a hundred miles from any white man's shebang, I reckon, and if our guns don't save us, our scalps are goin' to be strung on the lodge-poles before sundown!"

The distant rider had moved out a little from the cover of the cactus, and was sitting on his shaggy pony, surveying the camp with eagle eyes. That he was in sight of the white men did not seem to trouble him at all. He sat his pony coolly, surveying the camp. The Kid's eyes gleamed.

"I guess it's pie to that pack finding this outfit here!" he grunted. "He sure figures that he's got us cinched, hosses and scalps and all the caboodle! I don't say he misses his guess, either. But—" The Kid calculated the distance. "It's a durned long shot, but a galoot might bring it off!"

Ramon, the guide, came out of the camp and joined them.

"That is El Cascabel, the Apache," he said, in Spanish. "I know him; I have seen him."

"A chief?" asked the Kid.

"Si, *senor*—chief of a tribe of outcast Apaches, who live in the desert, and have never submitted to the Mexican Government."

The Kid nodded.

"I guess the bunch might keep off if they missed their king-pin," he remarked. "Say, feller, you get my rifle while I keep an eye on the guy!"

Ramon went back to the camp.

The Apache, in the distance, still sat his horse, as motionless as a statue. He was taking in every detail of the Mexican camp, unmoved by the fact that the two white men stood watching him. He knew that he was out of effective rifle-range, and he was ready for instant flight if horsemen stirred from the camp.

The Kid, his gaze leaving the Apache for a few moments, glanced back at the tent in the camp. Conchita, the half-breed peon girl, was taking the morning meal into the tent, for its unseen occupant.

Since the first day the Kid had seen nothing* of the Texan girl who so strangely accompanied this mysterious outfit into the desert. But his thoughts had been with her often. His look was gloomy now.

"The señorita Tejana is in no danger, amigo," said Alvarado. "Todos los Santos! There are enough of us to defend her!"

"Mebbe," grunted the Kid, "and mebbe not! I guess you was plumb loco to bring a woman into this desert, feller!"

Alvarado made no reply.

The whole camp was aware now of the proximity of the Redskin scout, and all the Mexicans were looking to their weapons.

Ramon came back with the Kid's rifle.

The boy puncher examined it carefully, and then, dropping on one knee, aimed it, taking slow and careful aim at the distant Indian.

El Cascabel saw the action, but he did not move. Impassive as a figure of bronze, he sat his shaggy pony, watching.

"He is too distant, senior," said Don Alvaro.

"He sure figures that he is," said the Kid; "and I guess it gets my goat to draw a bead on him; but he ain't levanting to call his gang on to us if I can stop him. I guess this hyer rifle will carry the distance, and it's that buck for the long trail!"

The Kid dwelt long on his aim, and the eyes of all the Mexicans were upon him. The Indian still sat his horse impassive!

Crack!

The report of the rifle rolled in a thousand echoes across the desert.

"Nombre de Dios, he is hit!" shouted Alvarado, as the Indian was seen to reel in his saddle.

For a moment El Cascabel looked as if he would fall. Evidently the long-distance shot had struck. But he righted himself, pressed a hand for a moment to his shoulder, and brandished a tomahawk at the Mexicans; then, wheeling his pony, he galloped away at a furious speed. In a few moments the dust of the desert swallowed him from sight.

The Kid rose to his feet, shrugging his shoulders.

"Look out for trouble now," he said, and he walked back to the camp.

Camp had been broken, and under the rising sun Don Alvaro Alvarado had taken the trail. The captured litter, swinging on its poles harnessed to four mules, rolled on in the midst of the little crowd of horsemen and pack-mules.

Ramon, the guide, led the way across a rocky tract that retained little or no sign of the passage. Many on uneasy glance was thrown backward by the dusty riders as they went.

That El Cascabel, the Apache, had fled to call his braves to bloodshed and plunder all knew; and the Rio Kid, at least, did not believe that the savage denizens of the desert could be eluded. The loot of such an outfit was boundless wealth to the ragged, desperate thief-Apaches who haunted the desert outside the edge of civilisation. There was only one hope of escaping an attack, to the Kid's mind—the chance that El Cascabel might succumb to his wound, and sink down from his horse before he rejoined his crowd. That, the Kid figured, was all the chance that stood between the Mexican bunch and a swarm of Redskins.

The Kid's face was grim.

Desperate fighting was not new to him—the Apaches had no terrors for the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. He was thinking of the Texan girl in the litter, carried into the desert a prisoner and in dire peril of falling into the hands of savages. The Kid drew his mustang to the side of Don Alvaro, who was urging on the cavalcade to its greatest speed.

"Where you hitting for, feller?" the Kid asked abruptly.

"Ramon is the guide," answered Alvarado.

"You ain't aiming to get out of the desert?"

"No, senior."

"There ain't a dog's chance of dropping them Apaches," growled the Kid. "I'll tell the world they won't let this outfit get clear."

"Then we shall fight." The Mexican smiled. "All the more reason, senior, why I am glad that you joined company with us. A caballero like you will be very useful when the fighting begins."

"I guess them Redskin will hear my guns talk a few," said the Kid. "Dag you sure ought to be hitting for the settlements with that lady in the litter."

"We are too far from the settlements, senior, to have any hope of reaching them, if the Indians are in pursuit of us."

The Kid was silent. He had no doubt that statement was correct.

"We may elude them yet, seniorito," said Alvarado. "I see no sign of pursuit so far. Probably El Cascabel found us by chance, and his braves may be far away. And on these rocks we leave no trail for them."

The Kid grunted.

"I guess them bucks would pick up the trail of a cicada, if there was loot and scalps at the end of it," he said. "What you want to look for is some place where we can stand off them reds when the pinch comes."

"Ramon knows of such a place, senior."

"That what you hitting for now?"

"Si, senior."

The Kid said no more. It was all that could be done, since they were in the heart of the desert, far from any possible aid.

Through the long, hot hours of the morning the cavalcade pushed on. Mile after mile of barren plain, studded with lone cactus and yucca, passed under the hoofs of the horses and mules.

Under the blaze of noon the bunch still pressed on. Ahead of them now, rising abruptly from the sandy, stony plain, was a strange shape of pyramidal form which the Kid guessed was the present destination of the bunch. The Kid did not need telling what it was—he had seen an Aztec teocalli before, in the Gila desert of Arizona. And he gave a nod of approval. If there was to be a fight with a swarm of savage Apaches, a stronger position could not have been picked out, within the limits of the desert.

With lagging steps, under the hot sunshine, the outfit pushed on, and early in the afternoon the teocalli was reached.

It was a circular pyramid of banked-up earth, covered and faced with blocks of ancient stone, rising in a series of gigantic steps to the level top.

Much of the ancient pyramid had crumbled away, under the hand of time, and under the burning sun and fierce hot winds of the desert. But the lower terraces were mostly intact.

The Kid looked with curious eyes at the strange old memorial of a distant past.

Set alone in the midst of the desert, far from the habitations of men, the teocalli told of a time when men had dwelt there. It marked, perhaps, a halting-place of the Aztecs, on their mysterious journey from the north before they arrived in the rich valley of Mexico and settled there. If habitations had existed every vestige of them was gone; only the stone-faced earthen pyramid remained, upon which, in those past days, human sacrifices had bled under the obsidian knife of the priest.

On one side of the teocalli, old stone steps led up to the summit. The steps were worn and crumbled, but still accessible.

Opposite the ancient staircase, the Mexican bunch halted. Hot as it was, weary as all the riders were, not a moment was lost. The mules were unpacked, and the baggage carried up the steps. The horses and mules, with rough hands grasping the bridles, were forced up the shallow steps. The litter, left by the mules, lay on the ground, and

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Rough on the Kid!

THE cracking of the muleteer's whip rang like a succession of pistol-shots. Dust rose in clouds under the rapid tramp of horses' hoofs. The Mexican bunch was in rapid motion.



CAUGHT NAPPING! As the Mexican lit his cigarette there was a whizz of a circling rope, and a loop descended over the Kid's shoulders. In a moment he was dragged to the ground! (See Chapter 4.)

Don Alvaro approached the side and called to the girl within.

The Kid's eyes were curiously upon him.

That the handsome Mexican had forcibly taken the Texan girl from her home at Pajito, from the house of her guardian, the Kid could not help knowing. It was for her sake that the boy puncher was riding with the Mexican bunch. The girl was a captive; yet apart from the fact of her captivity Don Alvaro treated her with all the polished courtesy of a Spanish hidalgo. The Kid was puzzled and worried. Had the Mexican treated her otherwise, the Kid would have pulled a gun on him, in spite of the fact that Alvarado had saved him from a panther in the desert. But the Mexican, notwithstanding his lawless action, was a caballero, and a princess could not have been treated with more courtesy and deference than the girl who was a prisoner in the litter.

It was a puzzle to the Kid, and it troubled him.

"Senorita," Don Alvaro spoke softly, "will it please you to alight? We camp again."

The curtain was pulled aside; the girl's face, half-hidden by a silken rebozo, looked out.

"Has your prisoner any choice, Don Alvaro?" she asked.

"Senorita, it is necessary to alight and mount the steps yonder. Your tent will be placed above."

The girl's eyes turned in surprise on the teocalli.

"What is that?" she asked, forgetting for the moment that she was speaking to a man who was her gaoler, if not her enemy.

"A monument of the Aztecs, who once lived in my country, senorita," said Don Alvaro. "It is called a teocalli in the Aztec tongue."

"We take refuge there?"

"We camp there, senorita," answered the Mexican evasively.

The girl's lip curled.

"I have heard the talk of your men, and I have lived long enough in Mexico to understand Spanish," she said. "We are pursued by Indians."

"It is possible that the Indians may pursue us, senorita. But if so we shall easily drive them off," said the Mexican. "You need have no fear."

"I have no fear," answered the girl coldly. "But you have much to answer for, Senor Alvarado. The guilt will be upon you if I find my death in this desert."

The Mexican compressed his lips. "No danger shall reach you, senorita, while a man here can strike a blow in your defence," he said in a low voice.

"Yes, you are brave, even if you are a villain, Don Alvaro," said the Texan girl bitterly. "When I used to see you at my guardian's house at Pajito I believed you a caballero. And you are a kidnapper, a picaro, a lepero. You will not even tell me why you have carried me away from the Casa Manderson. Is it for ransom, because my guardian is rich?"

The Kid saw the Mexican wince as if he had been struck.

"Nombre de Dios! Can you suppose that, senorita?" asked Don Alvaro, in a low, trembling voice.

"Then why, if you do not seek a ransom?"

"I cannot tell you, senorita. Will it please you to alight and accept my assistance to mount the teocalli?"

"I am under the orders of my gaoler," said the girl. "But I do not need the assistance of a picaro."

She stepped from the litter.

Leaving Don Alvaro standing motionless by the litter, with the pallor almost of death in his handsome, olive face, the girl mounted the first of the steps that led up the terraced teocalli.

Then she turned suddenly to the Rio Kid. The puncher lifted his Stetson, his face colouring with sudden embarrassment. He had exchanged no word hitherto with the prisoner of the litter, but he knew that she must have seen him riding with the bunch.

"And you are one of these picaros," she said in a quick, low voice. "You are from Texas—I have heard you speak—I know it—"

"Kid Carfax, of Texas, miss," stammered the Kid.

"And you, a Texan, are in league with these Mexicans, and you will not help a prisoner in the hands of kidnappers."

The Kid's face was scarlet. Don Alvaro made a stride towards them as if to intervene. Then he halted in his tracks.

"You see, miss," stammered the Kid miserably. "I—I guess—"

"A Texas puncher, leagued with Mexican kidnappers!" exclaimed the girl scornfully.

"Tain't exactly that, miss," mumbled the Kid. "I guess I ain't one of this bunch, nohow, miss. I guess I'm only riding with this outfit, miss, because you are along. But—that Mexican guy, miss, he's a white man, and I guess I ain't no bunch to pull a gun on him."

"A white man—and a kidnapper!"

"I sure don't rightly get the hang of this hyer lay-out," admitted the Kid. "But—"

Don Alvaro stood looking on, silent. "Listen to me!" said the girl, speaking rapidly, as if she feared interruption, though the Mexican made no motion to interrupt. "I am Joan Valence. My guardian, Job Manderson, lives at

Summer Days are Scouting Days, and the Call of the Open is heard everywhere. Adventure is to be found on the wayside, in the woods, and on the hills, and the Boy Scout is following that trail with keenness and zest.

SCOUTING DAYS!

YOU can be as good a scout, and every bit as happy, without equipment as the fellow completely rigged out with the entire regulation scout kit—but only if you know your scoutcraft as every good fellow in love with the open air should know it.

Scoutcraft! Why, that word covers an enormous amount of happiness. There is absolutely unlimited scope for jolly times, whether you are one of a troop or just one of two or three fellows together for a day's outing in the woods and fields, thirsting for the fine companionship of the great highway and the by-paths and lanes of our countryside.

"Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile—smile—smile!" You know the honoured old ditty, of course. Well, that is the chief thing to observe on any outdoor expedition—to smile, and leave your troubles where you can forget 'em. Pack them up in the metaphorical kit-bag—and lose the lot!

Seriously, though, that question of kit is always coming to the fore. The one big thing you must not forget to take with you is good humour. Forget everything else, but don't omit that. And another important item of equipment is shoes or boots. Have them stout, without being heavy. And the socks should match. Shun the fancy variety of hosiery when on the trek. Have them stout, and if possible without darns.

Your boots or shoes may decide to play you a trick and burst the laces. Well, that's easy. Carry an emergency pair. There's nothing that so plainly indicates the Tenderfoot as laces knotted in a join—or string used as a substitute.

Some kit, of course, you must take with you. But whatever you do, don't start out for the day with a load. Life becomes a burden on a hot day when there are a lot of things to lug around. Next to the day's supply of food—unless you are going to buy your meals somewhere on the trek—I place in importance as an article of kit a good, workmanlike mackintosh or raincoat or waterproof sheet.

Even if it doesn't rain, you will find some such damp-resisting gear absolutely invaluable if you have to sleep out. Ever tried sleeping out? No? Well, it's *always* a very moisty job by night, however hot and dry the days themselves may be, and no sane scout ever rests his bones on damp ground if he can avoid it!

Two raincoats or other form of waterproof can quickly be hooked together to form a shelter for two or three of you against a sudden downpour, or they can be secured to a bush or low tree to form a shelter at mid-day against the hot sun when you have your victuals. Hot sun—thirst. Yes, they go together sure enough, and so you will need to carry clear water for drinking unless you can be sure of getting it on your outing. Use as little of it as possible—it's bad stuff to travel on; nearly as bad as mineral waters, ice-cream, and such fal-lals and, in the way of solids, chocolate and sweets. But that question of grub we must talk about another time during this series of articles, when we will chat over a few more secrets of happiness and success in scoutcraft.



Pajito; you must have heard of him if you know this country. He is an oilowner, and rich. Take him word where to find me, and he will reward you—richly."

The Kid's face was already scarlet, but it seemed to redden more.

"Take him word, or take word to the alcalde of Pajito, who is his friend," said Joan. "If you cannot help me, or dare not, give my friends a chance to save me from that villain!"

Without waiting for a reply from the hapless Kid, the girl turned from him and mounted the steps of the teocalli.

The Kid turned towards Don Alvaro. The Mexican advanced a few paces and stood facing him in silence.

The Kid breathed hard.

"I reckon you heard what the lady said, feller?" said the Kid quietly.

"Si, senior."

"What she says goes! You got me clear when a panther had his claws on me," muttered the Kid, "but that don't cut no ice now. That's a girl from my own country, and I guess I'm standing by her. Either you hit the trail back to Pajito and take her to her friends, or—"

"Jamas! Never!"

"Or it's you or me, Greaser!" said the Kid. "You or me is a dead man if you don't let up on that Texas girl!"

"You have given me fair warning, senior, as you said you would, if you became my foe instead of my friend," said Don Alvaro gravely. "It is understood now! We are foes!"

"Sure—unless you take Miss Valence back to Pajito!"

"That I cannot do!"

"Then I guess it's got to come to gun-talk!" said the Kid, with a sigh. "It gets my goat, it sure does, seeing as you saved me from the painter, and I reckon you're a white man all through, 'cepting for jost one thing. But there ain't no help for it! It's you or me, feller!"

The Mexican's eyes glinted.

"I shall be sorry to kill you, seniorito, but if you leave me no choice—"

There was a shout from Ramon on the teocalli.

"Los Indios!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Fight on the Teocalli!

"LOS Indios!"

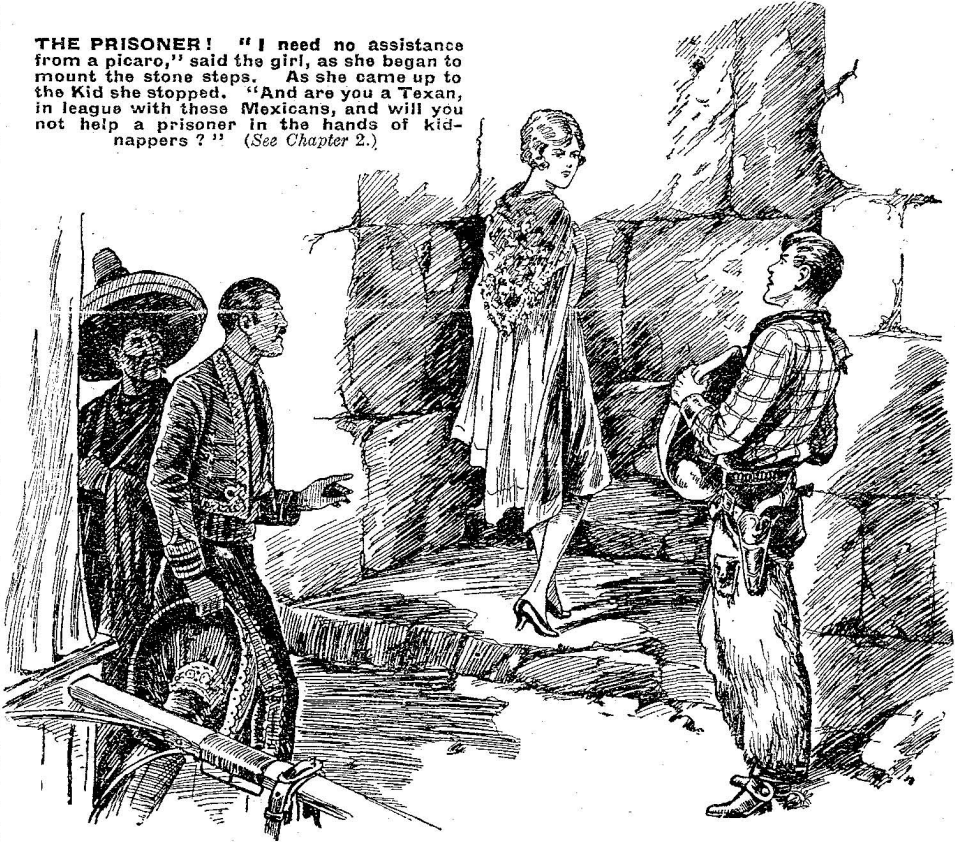
The cry was taken up by all the Mexicans.

The Indians were in sight.

Far away, with spear-points glittering in the sunlight through a cloud of dust, a bunch of riders appeared on the plain. They were riding on the trail of the Mexican outfit, heading direct for the teocalli, and, though still at a distance, evidently knew where to look for the white men. Little as was the sign that had been left, it had proved more than sufficient to guide El Casabel and his savage braves.

The Kid and Alvarado, facing one

THE PRISONER! "I need no assistance from a picaro," said the girl, as she began to mount the stone steps. As she came up to the Kid she stopped. "And are you a Texan, in league with these Mexicans, and will you not help a prisoner in the hands of kid-nappers?" (See Chapter 2.)



another, paused and hesitated. The Mexican suddenly smiled.

"Seniorito, los Indios!" he said. "Shall we postpone our quarrel until later? Every gun will be needed now to save Donna Juana from the Apaches. And if I kill you, amigo, or you kill me, it will add to her danger, and you do not desire that."

The Kid felt a deep relief.

He could not be deaf to the appeal the Texan girl had made. But it went sorely against the grain with him to draw a weapon on the man who had saved his life. And the Mexican's words were true. In the race of the savage enemy, it would have been madness for the white men to quarrel. Every gun was needed now.

The Kid nodded.

"I guess that's hoss-sense, feller," he said. "We got to keep them red bucks off, that's a cinch. And I sure should hate to spill your juice, anyhow. When the coast's clear, we'll see about it, feller. Jest at present I guess we got to stand pat."

"Be it so!"

No time was lost now in talk. The Redskins were still distant, but they were approaching fast, their shaggy ponies covering the ground at a much greater speed than that at which the Mexican bunch had travelled. The litter was dragged up the crumbling steps of the teocalli, and all the baggage followed it. On the top of the ancient mound was ample space for a camp, and in the centre, where the sacrificial stone once had stood, the tent was erected for Joan Valence—Donna Juana, as Alvarado called her. There the girl was safe from flying bullets, and it was certain that the lead would soon be flying thickly.

The Kid looked round the position taken up by the Mexican bunch, and he

viewed it with approval. It was not an easy position to attack. The sides of the teocalli, cut in terraces, looked like a series of gigantic steps from a distance; but each "step" of the successive terraces was more than a dozen feet in height, difficult enough for the most active Redskin to clamber up. Only where the flight of stone stairs had been cut by the ancient Aztecs was access easy, and the stair would be commanded by the fire of the men above. The Kid reckoned that in such a position the bunch ought to be able to stall off almost any number of Redskins. There was only one stairway cut in the side of the teocalli, and it was not more than three feet wide.

In a cloud of dust, with trampling hoofs, the Apaches drew closer, and the Kid's keen eyes picked out among them the chief he had wounded with his long-distance shot that morning. For a time it looked as if the Apaches, who numbered at least fifty, would ride right on to the teocalli; but at a short distance they separated into two parties and rode round it, brandishing their spears and uttering fierce yells.

There was a spattering of fire from the Mexicans. But the lead was wasted on the rapidly moving horsemen, still at a distance as they circled the teocalli. The Kid did not waste a shot. He waited and watched, with a sarcastic grin on his face. He had seen Redskin tactics before, and he was not likely to be "rattled" by war-whoops, and brandished spears. Some of the Mexicans round him, however, had uneasy looks. Indian warfare, the Kid reckoned, was new to most of them; it was their first sight of the outcast Apaches of the desert.

From many of the lances brandished by the Redskins tufts of hair flew in

the wind, and all the bunch knew what they were—scalps—trophies taken from lone white men killed in the desert, or from Yaqui or Comanche or Navajo. Some of the bunch on the summit of the teocalli were feeling their own scalps insecure on their heads.

Round and round the teocalli the Redskins circled, the circle narrowing as they raced, bringing them closer and closer, but in such rapid motion that firing was futile. The yells uttered by the savages rang clearly to every ear with a blood-curdling effect. The attack might come at any moment; the Apaches were working themselves into a state of wild excitement and fury.

The Kid gave his six-guns a careful look; they were going to be needed now as they had seldom been needed before. Alvaro Alvarado stood leaning on a rifle, cool and calm, but the Kid noted that his glance dwelt oftener on the tent that hid the Texan girl than on the yelling Indians. Perhaps at that moment the Mexican regretted that he had brought the girl into the wilderness of

the Sonora desert, far from all aid if he fell.

"Watch out, you 'uns!" said the Kid. "They're coming!"

At some imperceptible signal from El Cascabel the circling of the wild riders ceased, and the whole band rode in towards the teocalli, closing in from all sides at once.

The rush was so sudden and swift that the Redskins reached the circular mound almost in a second. A score of them flung themselves from their ponies at the foot of the stone stair and came surging and scrambling and trampling up in a screaming mob, with flashing spears and tomahawks, while the rest essayed to climb the terraced sides of the mound from the backs of their horses.

"Shoot!" roared the Rio Kid.

His guns were blazing now.

Every rifle was blazing away, filling the hot air with a deafening din.

The fire that swept down the stone stairway swept it almost clear. Right and left reeled the yelling, screaming

savages, sprawling over one another, but still those that were not struck scrambled and clambered on. With burning eyes and snarling mouths, like wild beasts athirst for blood, they came on, heedless of death in their fierce eagerness for slaughter. But the fire swept them down, and hardly a man in the wild crew reached the top of the steps.

But loud yelling from other quarters showed that some of the Indians had succeeded in clambering from their horses' backs up the steep sides of the teocalli. Wild figures were running round the lower terrace, seeking access to the next, and there was plenty of handhold and foothold among the stones and earth crumbled by time. The Kid, turning from the scene of slaughter on the stone stair, saw five or six howling demons on the summit, that had succeeded in scrambling up. Don Alvaro's voice rang out, shouting to his men, and he rushed at the enemy with his rifle clubbed. Machete in hand, his men followed him, and there was
(Continued on opposite page.)



No. 7.—HILARY BUCHANAN TALKS.

WHAT is dirt track racing like—from the rider's point of view? That is the question I have been asked to answer here.

I will make it plain at once that life loses a lot of its dullness as soon as one takes up a career like mine. I realised this when, some little time ago now, I paid my first visit to a dirt track. That, of course, was in Australia, where I was born and where I have spent the greater part of my life.

I was so thrilled with the spectacle of the riders broadsiding round the bends at tremendous speeds on their powerful machines, throwing up showers of cinders behind them, that I decided there and then to go in for the sport myself.

I could hardly ride a motor-bike at all in those days. But I bought a good machine and learned to do so while actually practising on the track!

I found that dirt track racing was even more wonderful than I expected it would be. I can't describe what a thrill it is to swing round one of those corners in a terrific broadside. It feels at first just as if the back wheel is coming off: it seems, in fact, quite impossible for one to remain on the bike.

But the secret is to open the throttle when one begins to heel over. Balance can then be recovered, and a moment later one is flashing along the straight again.

I found it hard at first to bring myself to "turn on the gas" as I was going over. When things are like that one feels that it would be just asking for trouble to attempt a higher speed. As a result, I used to end up on the ground more times than not, with the bike on top of me!

But soon I began to get the knack of it, and falls like that became less frequent.

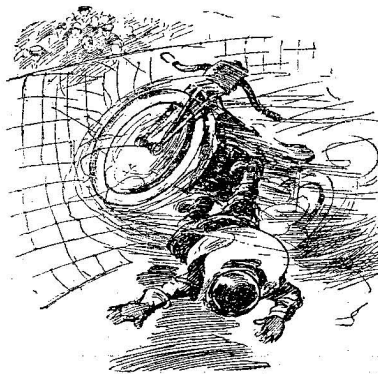
THE POPULAR.—No. 548.

In fact I acquired confidence. Yet sometimes that proved to be just as great a handicap. I would, for instance, start believing that I should have no trouble in getting round some corner or other when I was going at a colossal speed, and I would refuse to slow down as much as I ought to do because of it.

And then, when I was in the middle of the broadside I would realise that I was wrong and that I hadn't the power to hold the bike on the track at such a speed! In such cases it was the fence for me!

Sometimes, if I was lucky, I was able to pick up the bike and walk back to the pits unaided. But sometimes the ambulance men had to assist me!

Still, we dirt track riders have to be prepared for that sort of thing. We can't expect to go for long without a crash, no matter how much experience of riding we may have had.



I hit the rails with a mighty crash.

But, like the other riders, I learnt in time how to fall with the least possible chance of being hurt. The secret of this is, again, to drive the machine "all out" as soon as one begins to go over. Even if it doesn't help the rider to retain his balance, this method brings him down in a long, sweeping broadside, which is far less likely to injure him than a sudden halt.

The greatest danger that we have to face is, of course, the chance that another rider will go into us when we have fallen over.

I had a most exciting taste of this at Wimbledon once last season. I happened to be in quite good form, and I was three or four lengths in front of the second man when, on the last lap, I overdid a broadside and came down.

As I hit the ground I heard an ear-splitting roar just behind, and I saw in the fraction of a second that this rider was coming straight for me!

I thought at the time that my last moment had come. But then, with a frantic effort, I managed to roll clear. As I did so there was a loud crash as the other rider went into my machine—just where I had been lying—and dived over his own handlebars, landing close beside me. It sounds a miracle, but—neither of us was even scratched!

But I think the most exciting race I have known was one that took place at the same track a few weeks ago. It was the first heat of the Golden Gauntlet event, and there were, as usual, four of us riding—Frank Arthur, "Smiling" Jim Kempster, Mart Seiffert, and myself.

Frank Arthur secured a big lead at the start, and for the first lap I was last of the four. And then I managed to go round a bend in one of the best broadsides I have ever done.

That acted as a kind of spur to me. I decided that I was not going to be beaten so easily, and I set out to give the others a real good chase.

Soon I passed Mart and Jim. But Frank was still in front, and the spectators were considering the event finished.

Once I thought I was over for certain—but I just managed to stop on, although I was determined not to slacken speed. But Frank's lead had become too big to cut down altogether, and in spite of a despairing effort that I made to get round him on the last bend, he was three lengths in front of me when the finishing flag went down.

Hilary Buchanan

savage hand-to-hand fighting all over the level summit of the teocalli. And while it went on there came another rush up the stone steps, headed by El Cascabel with brandished tomahawk.

All was wild confusion now. But the Kid, in the midst of the confusion and din, was cool as ice. He faced the rush up the steps, his six-guns roaring, and Redskin after Redskin went crashing back, rolling down the steps to the plain below. But three or four of the assailants reached the summit, and passed the Kid, among them El Cascabel.

The Mexicans were fighting hand to hand now, and more than one of them had gone down under thrusting spear or crashing tomahawk. The Kid's revolvers clicked empty, and there was no time to reload. He thrust them back into the hosters and grasped his rifle, and the whirling butt hurled back a fire-eyed savage who was leaping upon him. The next moment the butt was at the Kid's shoulder, and the Winchester was spraying bullets on the Redskins who had reached the summit. Fast as the Kid pulled trigger, not a shot missed its mark. The white men had gained the upper hand, and of the Apaches who had reached them only one still lived—El Cascabel, in the grasp of Alvarado, rolling over and over in desperate fight.

Again came a rush up the stone stairway from the plain, and the Mexicans gathered at the head of the stair to drive it back, and again the shrieking savages were swept down. And as he fired on the scrambling demons the Kid, with the tail of his eye, as it were, saw Don Alvaro down under the Apache chief, and El Cascabel's knife flashing in the sun as it was lifted to strike. The Kid's rifle swung round and his last shot was fired to save Alvarado, barely in time. The Apache's knife descended, but missed as the bullet crashed into his brain, and El Cascabel fell dead across the panting Mexican.

Don Alvaro hurred aside the inert body and staggered to his feet. He gave a wild, breathless stare round. The Apaches—what were left of them—had ceased to attack—they were scrambling on their shaggy ponies for flight. More than half the savage band had gone down, more than half the rest were wounded. Victory remained with the Mexican bunch, and from the top of the teocalli they fired fast on the retreating Apaches, and many of the Redskins rolled from their ponies' backs as they dashed away into the desert.

"Por todos los santos!" breathed Alvarado, "por todos los santos!" The fight was over.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

From Friends to Foes!

UNDER the red glare of the sunset the Rio Kid sat, his face thoughtful, cleaning his six-guns. Hours had passed since the fight; all was quiet on the lonely teocalli. From the plain below there came a low growling and snarling from hordes of coyotes, gathered from all quarters, the scavengers of the desert.

The teocalli had been cleared of the slain Redskins, flung carelessly down to the coyotes on the plain below. Three of the Mexicans, who had fallen in the fight, had been buried on the summit by their comrades; for the Redskins there was the burial of the desert.

The survivors of the marauding band had long vanished over the distant horizon, and the Kid figured that they were not likely to return. El Cascabel



BATTLE ROYAL. The Kid, turning from the scene of battle on the stone stair, saw five or six howling demons on the summit that had succeeded in scrambling up. Don Alvaro's voice rang out, shouting to his men, and he rushed at the enemy with his rifle clubbed. (See Chapter 3.)

had fallen, and his band had been almost wiped out in the fierce conflict. What were left were likely to think of little but escape. The Kid was not worrying about them—he was thinking of his own strange situation, and the appeal that Joan had made to him. What he was to do in the strange circumstances the Kid did not know; and he was thinking it over with a corrugated brow.

Don Alvaro came towards him at last. The young Mexican's face was grave, and the Kid met him with a grim look. He had finished cleaning his guns, and now he slowly reloaded them, the Mexican watching him in silence for some minutes.

"We take the trail when the moon rises, senior," said Don Alvaro, breaking the silence at last.

"I reckon that's your best break," said the Kid. "Them Reds won't have any hunch for hunting more trouble, I guess, but this ain't healthy country for white men. You hitting for the settlements?"

"No, senior."

"You aim to keep in the desert?"

The Mexican nodded.

"And the senorita?"

"The senorita Tejana remains in my care, senior," said Don Alvaro gravely. The Kid breathed hard.

"I don't rightly understand this game," he said. "But that Texas girl—the Senorita Tejana, as you call her—has sure asked me to help her out. That

ain't a thing a Texas puncher can say no to, feller."

"Si! But—" Don Alvaro smiled faintly. "I have lost three men in the fight with the Apaches, senior; but I have still a strong force. You are a brave caballero—one of the bravest—but you do not think that you can take the senorita from me by force?"

"I guess I'm going to try," said the Kid. "I should sure hate to spill your juice, feller, or any guy's here, after we've stood up together agin the Reds. You've got a crowd on your side, but that cuts no ice. I told you when I joined your bunch that I'd put you wise if I turned agin you. You've treated me like a white man, and I'm treating you like one. You can't keep the senorita away from her friends—you can't keep that Texas girl in the desert. I don't stand for it."

"Let us part, then, senior, in peace," suggested Don Alvaro. "I saved your life from the panther; you saved me from the knife of the Apache. After that I cannot take your life."

The Kid shook his head.

"I guess I got to help that Texas girl," he said stubbornly.

"Against such odds, senior?"

"That cuts no ice."

Don Alvaro rolled a cigarette and lighted it. That action, as the Kid realised too late, was a signal.

There was a sudden whiz of a circling rope, and a loop descended over the Kid's shoulders from behind.

He leaped up, gun in hand. But at that same instant a drag on the lasso tore him over, and he rolled on the teocalli.

Ramon, who had roped him in, dragged on the rope, and two or three of the Mexicans rushed upon him. In a moment, almost, the Kid was a prisoner in the grasp of many hands.

Don Alvaro threw away his cigarette and stood facing him, smiling. The Kid looked at him bitterly, as he stood with the grinning Mexicans holding his arms.

"You darned, dog-goned Greaser!" said the Kid between his teeth. "I reckoned you was a white man, and would give a guy a fair break. I sure did not guess that you would double-cross a galoot this-a-way."

"It is to save your life, senor," said the Mexican quietly. "I will not kill you, and—caramba!—I cannot let you kill me. Ramon has roped you in solely that your life may be spared."

"Let me go, you dog-goned Piute!" growled the Kid. "I guess—"

Don Alvaro shook his head. "Go in peace, and you shall go as soon as you choose," he said. "I seek only

to part in peace, senor. Take your guns and your horse and ride wether you will, and do not cross my trail again. I am your friend, senor; but if you seek to take the senorita from me I have no choice but to shoot you like a coyote. I ask only your word to ride away, and not to take my trail before dawn to-morrow."

"Or else—" said the Kid.

"Or else," said Don Alvaro—"or else, senor, you accompany me in my march, a prisoner, tied to the back of your mustang."

"I guess that wouldn't help the senorita any," said the Kid. "I give you my word, dog-gone you, I'll ride, and I sure won't look for your trail till sun-up to-morrow. That goes."

"I am satisfied."

At a sign from Don Alvaro the Mexicans released the Kid, and Ramon drew the lasso away.

Not another word was spoken.

The Kid saddled his mustang, packed on his slicker-pack, and led Side-Kicker down the stone stair to the plain. He gave one glance at the tent, but it was closed. He had no glimpse of the prisoner within. Then he left the

teocalli, the Mexicans staring after him curiously.

On the plain below the Kid mounted the powerful grey mustang. His determination was fixed. On the morrow he would take the trail of the Mexican bunch, and never quit it till he had rescued the Texas girl who had appealed to him for help, or die in the attempt. That was the Rio Kid's resolution, and nothing could change it. Sitting in the saddle, he looked back at the teocalli. The Mexicans were already breaking camp, preparing to hit the trail in the cool of the evening. On the summit of the teocalli stood the tall figure of Don Alvaro Alvarado, looking after the Kid.

As the Kid looked back the Mexican raised his sombrero in salute, and the Kid lifted his Stetson in return. Then, with a crack of his quirt, he put the mustang in motion and galloped away over the plain.

THE END.

(But the Kid intends to return, and follow the trail of this strange cavalcade. How he fares you will learn in next week's rousing long tale of the West, entitled: "SAVED BY AN OUT-LAW!")

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