

PACKED WITH QUICK ACTION, SHARP SHOOTING, AND RED-HOT ADVENTURE IN THE WEST!

THE RIO KID'S ENEMY!

By Ralph Redway.

There's a two-gun, sharp-shooting guy waiting in hiding for the Rio Kid's blood!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Crowding the Kid!

"**S**AY, bub!" Mesquite Bill, the long-limbed foreman of the Bar-One Ranch, lounged across the big room of the Golden Mule Hotel, and stopped at the table where the Rio Kid was eating his supper.

There was a shade of anxiety on the burly cowman's rugged, bearded face. The Kid looked up, smiling.

There was a big crowd in the timber hotel of Kicking Mule, and the attention of most of them was concentrated on the handsome young puncher who sat at the trestle table.

The Rio Kid had struck Kicking Mule only that day; but he was already the most talked-of guy in the cow-town.

The puncher who had made an attempt to trail down Black George, the road-agent, and who had had a shooting affray with the marshal of Kicking Mule, could not fail to attract attention.

The Rio Kid was, in fact, the cynosure of all eyes just at present.

Not that so much publicity pleased the Kid. Kicking Mule was far from the Rio Grande and the Pecos, where the Kid was best known; but there was always a chance of recognition if he got too much attention. And the sensation the Kid had made in the cow-town would certainly have been increased had any galoot recognised him as the outlaw of the Rio Grande.

"Say, bub, you want to watch out," said Mesquite Bill, as he stopped at the Kid's table.

"How come?" asked the Kid.

"I guess the marshal is coming."

"Sho!" said the Kid indifferently.

His glance cowman towards the wide doorway, outside which a naphtha lamp flared into the night.

Four or five figures moved outside the doorway, and among them the Kid's keen eye picked out Seth Starbuck, the marshal of Kicking Mule.

The marshal had a bandaged head under his Stetson hat, and a black and bitter expression on his hard face.

"Looking for this coon?" asked the Kid cheerfully.

"Sure."

"That Seth Starbuck is sure one hog," said the Kid. "He don't know when he's had enough."

"I guess," said Mesquite, "that you're the first guy that's ever beaten Starbuck at gun-play. You sure ought to have put that bullet through his cabeza, instead of jest creasing him like a steer, hombre."

The Kid laughed.

"Oh, shucks!" he said. "I came hyer to run down that firebug, Black George, not to shoot up the town marshal. I'm sure a peaceable galoot when I'm let be."

"The marshal ain't the guy to take it

lying down," said Mesquite, "and he's got three of his deputies with him; and I reckon he's going to run you into the calaboose, feller."

"I reckon not!" said the Kid.

He laid down knife and fork and rose to his feet. The Kid had not finished his supper yet; but there was more pressing business than supper on hand. He hitched his holsters a little forward, to bring the walnut-butted guns nearer to his hands. It was evident that he was going to want them.

Why the marshal of Kicking Mule had forced a quarrel on him and forced him into gun-play, the Kid did not know, and he wondered a lot. The man was a bully and a gunman; about the toughest town marshal that the Kid had ever struck in any part of Texas. Still, it was strange enough that even a reckless gunman, who was also a town marshal, should have forced trouble on a guy who had come to help him run down the road-agent who was the terror of the Kicking Mule country.

Whatever Starbuck's reason was, there was no doubt about the fact. He had tried to shoot up the boy puncher and failed disastrously, and now he was coming to look for more trouble. The Kid would have been glad to steer clear of trouble in the cow-town, but he was ready to give the marshal all he wanted. Starbuck came tramping into the big room, with his three deputies behind him. They came directly towards the Rio Kid, and the crowd opened to let them pass, and to keep out of the line of fire if shooting started.

The marshal was not touching a gun. He had already learned how swift the Kid was on the draw, and he had apparently fallen back on his official position as upholder of the law in Kicking Mule for dealing with the puncher who had beaten him at gunplay.



"Say, marshal," Mesquite Bill broke in before Starbuck could speak. "Say, you don't want to get your mad up. This hyer galoot is sure a white man from the toes up, and you got to allow that you pulled on him first in that little rookus at your office."

"Mind your own business, Mesquite!" growled the marshal.

He stepped past the big cowman, and fixed his eyes on the Kid.

The Kid smiled gently.

He was watching the marshal and his men like a cat, ready to draw and fire at the first sign of attack.

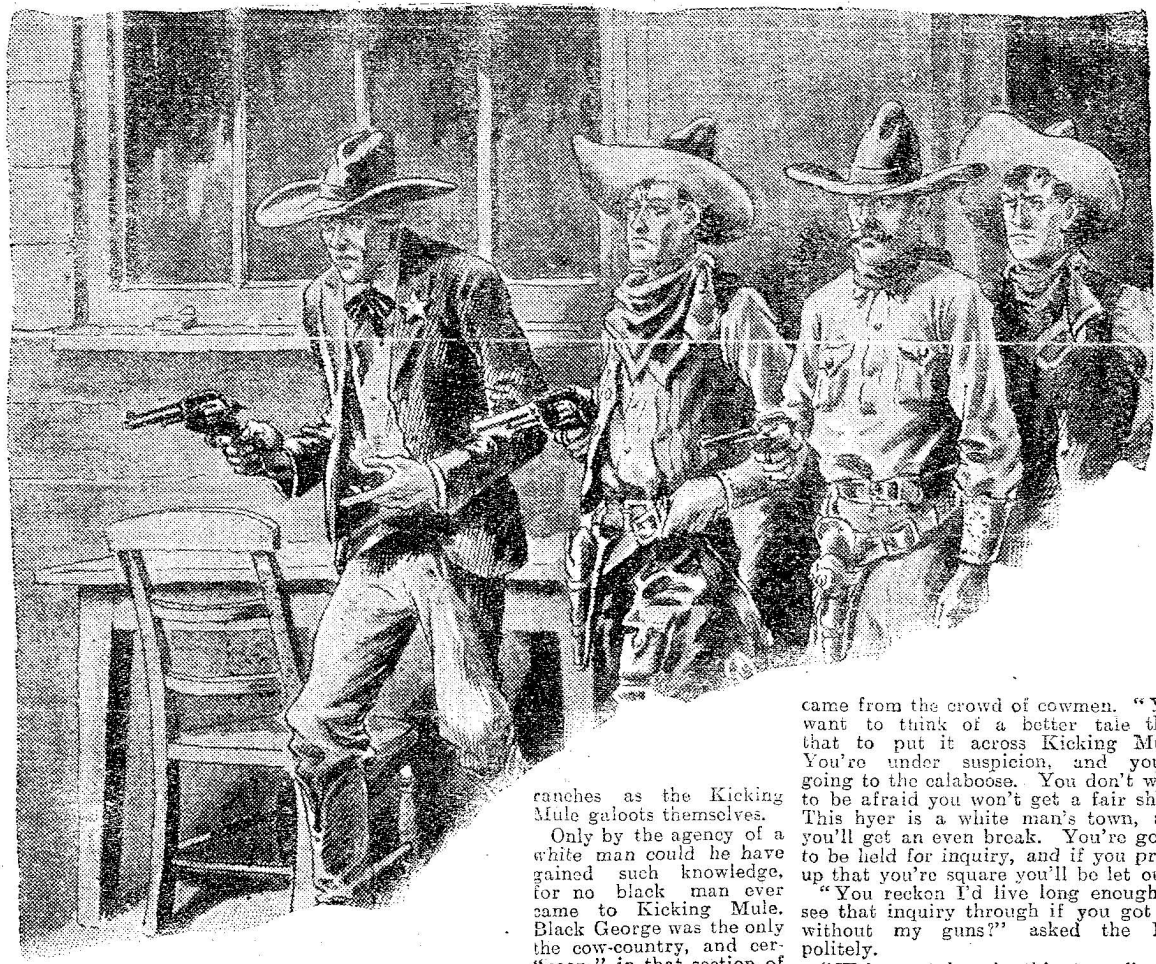
"Evening, marshal," he said politely. "You looking for a guy about my size?"

"You're wanted!" said Starbuck.

"Well, here I am, marshal."

"You'll hand over your guns—by the barrels, and hoof it along to the calaboose," said the marshal. "You're arrested."

"What's the charge?" asked the Kid. "You howling because you came out at



the little end of the horn, when you tried to get away with gunplay and slipped up on it?"

"You're arrested on suspicion," said Starbuck.

The Kid felt a momentary chill. If this hard-faced, gun-slinging lobo-wolf of a town marshal had got wise to it that he was the Rio Kid—the outlaw on whose head was a reward of a thousand dollars—

But he was relieved the next moment. To Starbuck's eyes, as to all other eyes in Kicking Mule, he was only what he looked—a boy puncher, who was uncommonly slick with his guns.

"You're a stranger hyer, and you hump into town with a tale of trailing Black George, the road-agent," said Starbuck. "Waal, I've suspicioned for a long time that that nigger trail-thief has got some side-pardner who's a white man and puts him wise to things. And I guess it looks powerful like you was that side-pardner."

There was a murmur from the crowd of cowmen, and many keen and suspicious eyes were turned on the Kid.

It had long been suspected in Kicking Mule that Black George, the mysterious negro who had haunted the trails for years, and had more robberies and murders to his credit than he had fingers and toes, had some confederate who gave him information.

It was certain that Black George seemed always wise to any attempt that was made to hunt him down; that he knew in advance when any valuable plunder was on the trails; that he had as much knowledge of the business of the cow-town and the surrounding

ranches as the Kicking Mule galoots themselves.

Only by the agency of a white man could he have gained such knowledge, for no black man ever came to Kicking Mule. Black George was the only the cow-country, and cer—"coon" in that section of

tainly the black trail-thief himself was never seen in the town.

The Kid's eyes glittered.

The marshal, in throwing this suspicion on the Kid, had taken up a stronger position than he could have obtained by gun-play. He had already failed at gun-play, and now he was playing a safer and surer card.

A silence followed his words.

It was broken by Mesquite Bill.

"Marshal, I guess you're after the wrong cayuse," said the foreman of Bar-One. "This hyer kid puncher turned up on the trail when Black George was holding up the stage, and went after the road-agent—and Jerry Cook can tell you so."

"Sure!" said the stage-driver. "That's straight, marshal. He went after the road-agent, and I reckoned he was going to his own funeral."

Starbuck laughed scoffingly.

"I guess that was eyewash," he said. "He fooled you easy."

"Aw, forget it," said the Kid. "I did trail that firebug, Black George, and he got away; but I sure followed his trail, and it led me right into this hyer town, like I told you, marshal."

"You won't get any guy here to believe that Black George rode into Kicking Mule in the daylight," said Starbuck derisively. "If he did, who's seen him?"

"It's got me beat," said the Kid. "But that hoss' trail wasn't telling no lies! He sure rode into Kicking Mule."

"Aw, can it!" said the marshal impatiently, while a murmur of incredulity

came from the crowd of cowmen. "You want to think of a better tale than that to put it across Kicking Mule. You're under suspicion, and you're going to the calaboose. You don't want to be afraid you won't get a fair show. This hyer is a white man's town, and you'll get an even break. You're going to be held for inquiry, and if you prove up that you're square you'll be let out."

"You reckon I'd live long enough to see that inquiry through if you got me without my guns?" asked the Kid politely.

"We've got law in this town," said the marshal, scowling.

"I guess I ain't banking a whole lot on the law, with you for the only law officer," grinned the Kid. "I sure do opine that once I gave up my hardware somebody's gun would go off accidental-like, and I should get mine sudden! I surely do reckon so, marshal; and I guess I'm freezing on to these guns like they was glued to me!"

The marshal drew a deep breath.

"You ain't surrendering to the law?" he demanded.

"Not this evening!" smiled the Kid.

"Then I call on all the men of Kicking Mule to help seize you in the name of the law!" exclaimed Seth Starbuck, "and if you reckon your guns will help you agin all this town, you're welcome to take the chance."

The marshal looked round on the crowd—more than two score of cowmen from the surrounding ranches.

"Boys, you hear me yaup? I accuse that puncher of being in cahoots with Black George, who shot up the ranger lieutenant on the Juniper trail to-day. He's my prisoner, and I call on every guy present to help arrest him."

There was a stirring in the crowd, and a buzz of many voices. The Kid's face set like iron, and his hands crept to his guns. At the same moment a tall man in a Stetson hat entered the Golden Mule with a jingle of spurs, and Mesquite Bill shouted:

"Hyer comes the boss! Marshal, I guess the boss of the Bar-One will have suthin' to say about this!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Marshal's Defeat!

COLONEL SANDERSON, boss of the Bar-One Ranch, glanced at the buzzing crowd gathered by the long trestle table, on the other side of which the Rio Kid stood, his hands on his guns.

He came swiftly over to the scene. The boss of the Bar-One was a tall man, with a bronzed face, rugged features, and a grizzled beard. The Bar-One was the biggest ranch in the Kicking Mule country, and the colonel a man of weight in the cow-town. Six or seven of the cowmen in the crowd belonged to his outfit, as well as Mesquite Bill.

"Say, you-uns, what's the rookus here?" asked Sanderson, in a deep voice, looking from face to face and frowning a little at the marshal and his deputies.

Whether the crowd had aimed to back up the marshal's call was a little uncertain, but if so they stood off as the boss of the Bar-One chipped in.

"You got no call to horn in hyer, Sanderson," said Seth Starbuck. "I guess I'm arresting a suspicious character, as town marshal, and toting him along to the calaboose. That's all."

"Who's the guy?" asked the rancher, with a glance at the handsome, sun-burnt face of the Rio Kid.

"I guess he calls himself Two-gun Carson; I'll say he's likely got as many names as he has toes," sneered the marshal.

The Kid smiled.

"I reckon a galoot's name don't matter a whole lot, s'long's a galoot's a white man," he said amiably.

"Mesquite, ain't that the guy that went after Black George on the trail, after the ranger was shot up?" asked the rancher.

"You've said it, sir."

The rancher's rather stern and grim face lighted, and he stepped towards the Kid and stretched out a hand across the trestle table.

"Shake!" he said.

"See here, Sanderson——" shouted the marshal.

Colonel Sanderson, unheeding, shook hands with the Rio Kid, who gave him the shake willingly enough. Then he turned to the marshal.

"Forget it, Starbuck," he said tersely. "If you're aiming to arrest suspicious characters, I guess you want to get after Black George, not after the guy who took a hand agin him."

"I should smile!" said Mesquite Bill.

The action and words of the rancher decided the matter for the Kicking Mule crowd. The Bar-One punchers moved forward, but it was to gather round their boss, with the evident intention of backing him in any trouble with the town marshal. The rest of the crowd receded a little.

Starbuck gritted his teeth.

"I'll tell a man that guy is in cahoots with Black George, and he's come hyer as the road-agent's spy in the town!" he snarled.

"What you got to back that up?" demanded the rancher. "We're all wise to it that Black George has got a spy in the town, seeing that a nigger can't horn in without being spotted to once. But what you got to back up putting it on this puncher?"

"He came in with a lie about trailing the road-agent, and started a rookus at my office," said the marshal sullenly. "I ain't saying he's guilty; I'm saying he's going to be held on suspicion, giving us time to inquire. That's the idee."

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"Aw, can it!" drawled the Kid. "You started the rookus, and slipped up on it, and never remembered that you was marshal till you found that you couldn't get away with it with your gun."

"An' that's the frozen truth," said Mesquite.

Some of the crowd laughed, and the marshal scowled savagely.

"You going to rope in every stranger that rides into town, on suspicion of being in cahoots with Black George, marshal?" asked the rancher contemptuously. "Forget it! If you want to get busy, get after Black George. That firebug has been cavorting around Kicking Mule all the while you've been town marshal, and I guess that ain't less'n four years. He shot up a man on the trail to-day; and it's your call to be after him, not roping in a stranger that looks a square man."

"The boss is sure talking now!" grinned Mesquite Bill. "Why ain't you roping in Black George, marshal, if you want to get busy?"

Seth Starbuck rapped out an oath.

"I guess the way to get Black George is to get hold of his side-pardner and make him squeal!" he said. "That puncher can tell us, if he likes, where the road-agent hides in the hills."

"Not by a jugful!" said the Kid.

"Guff!" snapped the rancher. "I've heard how you started trouble with that puncher, Starbuck; and you're sure using your office as marshal to get back on him because you slipped up on gunplay. I'll tell you, any man that is after Black George is my friend, and I'm standing for him."

"I guess I'm marshal of this town, and I'm arresting that hombre!" said Seth Starbuck, between his teeth. "You can't horn in here, rancher!"

"I guess I can horn in a few, and then some more!" retorted Sanderson. "You ain't no great shakes of a marshal, Starbuck, seeing that you can't handle Black George. I've told you so before, and I tell you so again. Some of us sent for the ranger, because you couldn't handle your job. The ranger's got shot up, and you're the galoot to get the man that did it. Get him before you talk so much."

"I'm taking that man, and I call on all the galoots present to help if he draws his guns!" said the marshal.

"Bar-One boys, stand by your boss!" rapped out the colonel.

"You bet!"

"Now, Seth Starbuck, there's a bunch you've got to walk over before you lay a paw on that puncher," said the rancher determinedly. "I guess you better think again."

The marshal's eyes blazed with rage.

There had never been any love lost between the ruffianly marshal of Kicking Mule and the boss of the Bar-One. And his failure to rope in the black road-agent who had ridden the trails for years round Kicking Mule had got the goat of the rancher, and caused him to treat Starbuck with open contempt. But for the fact that he was a big rancher, with a numerous and devoted outfit, Sanderson would have found trouble before with the marshal. Now it looked as if the ill-feeling between the two was coming to a head.

"I'm taking that man!" said Starbuck, in a choking voice.

"Get on with it, then," said the rancher coolly. "My bunch and I are standing for him, you want to know."

"You standing agin the law?" hissed Starbuck.

"Shucks for the law!" snapped the rancher. "You ain't toting that guy to the calaboose to get up a lynch crowd to string him up when he's handed over his guns, I guess I know your game,

Starbuck. You got a grouch agin him, and you don't believe he's in cahoots with Black George any more'n I do."

"Ain't he sure spilling a whole jugful?" chuckled Mesquite.

The marshal's hand slid to his gun. In his rage he seemed determined to start trouble.

But the three deputies behind him, accustomed as they were to backing up his play, were flinching now. Colonel



Sanderson was too big a man in Kicking Mule to be defied; and his half-dozen punchers had their guns drawn now—Mesquite a gun in either hand. Had the trouble started, the marshal and his men had no chance. The marshal's only chance was that the crowd would back him; and one glance at them showed that they had no idea of entering into a wild affray with the Bar-One boss and his bunch.

Enraged as he was, the marshal of Kicking Mule realized that there was nothing to it. His hand left his gun.

It was well for him, for the Rio Kid was watching him like a cat. The marshal would not have lived long enough to use his gun if he had drawn it.

"Forget it, marshal, and get to your job—which is roping in Black George," said the rancher.

"I guess that hombre will keep!" said Starbuck. "You and your bunch won't be around all the time to stand for him, dog-gone you!"

"You've said it," agreed the rancher. "I came into town to-day to meet the ranger, and I'm riding out to-night." He turned to the Kid. "Say, puncher, this town won't be healthy for you; Starbuck here has got it in his pocket. If you ain't got business in Kicking Mule, it'll be healthy for you to get on your cayuse to-night and hit the trail."

"I guess I got business," said the Kid. "I've hit this town to pick up sign on

Black George, and I ain't hitting any old trail till I've cinched that dog-goned firebug!"

"You're talking now," said the rancher. "But how come you figure you'll pick up sign on Black George in the town?"

"I sure followed his hoss' trail from the hills, and it led me plumb into Kicking Mule," answered the Kid.

"That's the story he pitched me at my office!" jeered the marshal. "I'll say it's a plumb lie."

The rancher looked puzzled.

"You're sure missing your guess, puncher," he said. "Black George never rode into this town. I guess he'd have been shot to pieces as soon as he showed his face hyer."

"I don't rightly get on to it," said the Kid. "But the trail led me into Kicking Mule, and there ain't no

Black George's side-pardner," he said. "Colonel, I'll say you're a dog-goned bonthead to stand for that cuss; but I ain't gunning after you and your bunch. That durned scallywag will keep!"

And with a sign to his men to follow, the marshal strode out of the Golden Mule.

His deputies followed him, and they disappeared. The marshal of Kicking Mule had scored a defeat, for the first time since he had been marshal of the cow-town. That, as every man in the building knew, was not the end of it. Starbuck was not the guy to take defeat lying down, and his next move was likely to be prompt, and fatal to the boy puncher who had defied him.

The Kid did not seem alarmed, however. He sat down to finish his interrupted supper, and Colonel Sanderson dropped into a seat opposite him. The

"Seth Starbuck's sure madder'n a hornet, with that firebug Black George defying him, and the whole town wanting to know why he don't rope the coon in," he said. "He's a bad man to cross, puncher, and you want to keep your eyes peeled."

"You've said it," agreed the Kid. "You looking for a job in this country? I sure got room for a good man on the Bar-One!" said the rancher.

"I'm looking for Black George, rancher. Is sure got my goat the way he shot up that ranger guy; and I guess I ain't punching cows till I got that dog-goned scallywag."

"That's talking!" agreed the rancher. "But I guess you'll live longer to trail Black George if you come on my ranch, than if you freeze on to this town. The marshal sure will get you sooner or later; and it'll be easy for him to raise a lynch crowd with a tale about Black George."

The Kid nodded thoughtfully. Now that the marshal of Kicking Mule was his deadly enemy, the Kid realised clearly enough that the cow-town was likely to prove a deathtrap to him. Starbuck had made a cunning move in accusing the Kid of being the road-agent's confederate, and a lynch crowd was not likely to listen to reason.

"You're sure talking hoss-sense, rancher," said the Kid, after a pause. "I'll sign on to your outfit and glad, and I guess you'll find that I can earn my corn on a ranch. But you'll give me time to get after that firebug and take it off the pay."

"Every man on the Bar-One will back you in getting after Black George, from the boss to the ranch cook," said Colonel Sanderson. "Say, it's a cinch, and you'll get your cayuse and ride out to the ranch with me at ten. That suit you?"

"Suits me fine," said the Kid.

And he finished his supper, rather pleased with the prospect before him. Fate had made the Kid an outlaw; he was a puncher at heart, and his heart was light at the prospect of mingling once more with a bunch of punchers in the bunkhouse of a ranch.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Shot on the Trail!

UNDER the bright stars of Texas the Rio Kid saddled up Side-Kicker at ten o'clock.

Colonel Sanderson's horse was brought round to the front by a stableman. The rancher came out and joined the Kid. In the doorway stood Mesquite Bill and another Bar-One puncher, to see their boss off. Their leave was not up till the following day.

The Kid's eyes swept the rugged, irregular street of Kicking Mule. He would not have been surprised at gunplay under the stars; and he did not look for an even break from Seth Starbuck.

But there was no sign of hostility, and



As the two horsemen entered the clearing, there came a roar of a six-gun, mingled with a cry from Colonel Sanderson as he reeled back in his saddle. "Black George!" panted the Kid.

mistake about that. It was the trail of Black George's cayuse all the way."

"Mebbe he changed hosses with another galoot in the hills," suggested Mesquite.

"Mebbe," assented the Kid; "and if it was that-a-way, it was the trail of his side-pardner that I followed into town."

The marshal of Kicking Mule gave a gruff, scornful laugh.

"I'll tell the world that it's you that's

threatened "rookus" was over, and the rancher and the boy puncher were left to themselves. The rancher's keen eyes, under his grizzled brows, read the handsome, sunburnt face before him.

"I guess I'm owing you a whole heap of thanks, rancher," said the Kid. "It sure did look like a bigger trouble than I could handle on my own when you horned in."

Sanderson smiled.

the Kid mounted his mustang to ride with the rancher to the Bar-One. Sanderson looked at Side-Kicker with an approving eye.

"That's sure some cayuse," he said. "You can tell the world he is, sir," said the Kid. But he felt a twinge of uneasiness as the rancher scanned the mustang. Side-Kicker was painted with brown stockings—the Kid's grey mustang was almost as well known as the Kid himself—and the Kid wondered for a moment whether the rancher's keen eyes were penetrating the horse's disguise. But the rancher swung himself to the saddle of his pinto without further comment, and, with a terse good-bye to his men in the doorway, cantered down the rugged street with the boy puncher.

The way lay through the town to the open trail on the western side, and so took the riders past the marshal's frame-house and office. The Kid's eyes were very wary as he rode by the building where, earlier in the day, his shooting affray with Starbuck had taken place. He wanted no more trouble with the marshal of Kicking Mule; but he knew that the trouble must come sooner or later, and he would not have been surprised by a shot from the shadows.

But the house and the office were dark; either the marshal was gone to bed, or he was elsewhere. The horsemen rode past the building, and left the cow-town behind them.

For a distance the way lay over an open prairie, glimmering in the shine of the bright stars. The horsemen rode side by side, speaking little; each busy with his thoughts. Black George, the road-agent, was the subject of their thoughts. The Kid was determined not to quit the Kicking Mule country till he had rounded up the black trail-thief. He had taken that resolution when the merciless ruffian shot up the ranger on the Juniper trail; but he was realising more clearly now the magnitude of the task he had set himself. And that task, difficult as it was, was made more so by the bitter enmity of the man who represented the law in the Kicking Mule country.

Sanderson's thoughts were running on the same subject. The mysterious black robber had defied the law so long that Sanderson, with several other ranchers, had taken the matter into their own hands, passing over the head of the marshal. They had sent for the Texas ranger lieutenant to take up the matter, only to learn that he had been shot dead on the trail by the black road-agent. How had Black George learned of his coming? That was a problem that the rancher tried in vain to solve. It pointed to a confederate of the trail-thief in Kicking Mule; yet it was not easy to see how the spy had got wise to a secret known only to four men—three ranchers and the marshal.

"I guess that black scallywag ain't getting away with it," said the rancher, breaking the silence suddenly. "I guess I'll move all Texas but what I'll see him strung up to a limb. Starbuck's no good to handle him, and I've told him so. I'll sure get a better man here than Starbuck. I reckon it's time Kicking Mule got a new marshal, and I guess plenty guys will back me in turning Starbuck down."

"He sure is some slouch of a marshal," agreed the Kid.

"I've told him what to look for," said the rancher grimly. "He knows that I'm against him now, and I've got influence enough in this section to see him run out of his office. Kicking Mule

is sure going to have a new town marshal before long."

He relapsed again into thought, and rode on in silence.

From the open prairie in the starlight the trail ran through a belt of post-oaks and pecans, where the shadows lay thick. Here and there, among the smaller trees, a giant cottonwood reared its mighty branches.

The trail was scarcely marked, and deep in shadow. Far away on the rim of the prairie was the glimmering crescent of the rising moon. But as yet there was only a glimmer of moonlight.

But the rancher knew well the trail he had ridden scores of times, and he rode on at a steady trot, the Kid a little behind.

From the darkness of the branches the riders emerged into a clearing, where the starlight and a glimmer of the moon fell more brightly.

At the same moment they sighted a horseman ahead of them on the trail.

He sat his horse motionless under a tree on the opposite side of the clearing, deep in shadow, facing them as they came.

But through the branches over him starlight filtered, and gleamed on a black negro face half-hidden by a Stetson hat.

The rider, wrapped in the ample folds of a Mexican serape, was hidden; only his black face showing, with the eyes gleaming under thick, overhanging brows.

As the two horsemen emerged into the clearing, and even as their eyes fell on him, the right hand of the black rider shot up from the folds of his serape with a six-gun in it.

Bang!

Mingled with the roar of the six-gun came a cry from Colonel Sanderson, as he reeled back in his saddle.

The Rio Kid panted.

"Black George!"

It had all passed like a flash; in less than a second after the black rider was sighted the rancher was falling from his horse, shot through the body.

But the next second the Kid's gun was in his hand, and he was shooting.

He spurred on his mustang as he fired, careless of bullets from the black horseman, and of the bullets that tore across his cheek and nipped away cloth from his shirt.

But the road-agent, the instant he had pulled trigger on the rancher, plunged headlong into the thickets and rode hard.

A savage laugh floated back from the darkness, followed by the crashing of the black horse, as the escaping road-agent drove him rapidly through pecan and post-oak and juniper.

Swift as the Kid's shooting was, the road-agent had vanished into the blackness too soon.

His teeth gritted, his eyes burning with rage, the Kid dashed after him, pumping out shots at the fugitive.

But the pursuit, in the darkness and the tangled underbrush, was almost hopeless, and the shooting was at random. Even so, the Kid would have kept it up relentlessly, but for the thought of the rancher. Sanderson had crashed down from his horse, sorely wounded if not dead; and the Kid could not abandon him while he hunted the outlaw through the brush.

With bitter chagrin, the Kid pulled in his mustang and rode back to the trail.

Faintly in the distant darkness the crashing of Black George's horse died away.

The Kid's teeth were set with rage as he rode back. It was the second time he had sighted Black George, the second

time that the mysterious trail-thief had escaped him. And he feared what he would find when he rejoined the rancher. Black George—who seemed to be wise to all that went on in Kicking Mule—had known that the rancher would be riding home by that lonely trail that night, and had lain in wait for him. No doubt he knew that Colonel Sanderson, who had taken the lead in sending for the ranger lieutenant, was his most dangerous enemy in the section, and he had aimed to shoot him up as mercilessly as he had shot up the ranger. The Kid, probably, he had taken for one of the colonel's bunch riding home with him in the shadowy gloom.

A tattoo of hoofs died away on the trail as the Kid rode back to the clearing where the rancher had fallen. The frightened horse had galloped off, leaving his master lying in the trail.

The Kid pulled in Side-Kicker and leaped to the ground. He bent anxiously over the fallen man.

"Say, rancher, you got it bad?"

There was no answer from the boss of the Bar-One. He lay still and silent, his upturned face gleaming ghastly in the glimmer of the stars.

"Carry me home to die!" muttered the Kid. "I surely guess that this guy had got his!"

The Kid, with swift and deft fingers, examined the rancher's wound. The shirt, as he opened it, was drenched with blood. The bullet had passed through the chest, and the Kid guessed that the damage was serious. The colonel was quite insensible, and seemed scarcely to breathe. But he was a strong and fit man, and the Kid figured that he had a chance to pull through, with prompt attention. Prompt attention the Kid gave him. His wild life had taught him a rough surgery, and in his slicker pack he had bandages. It was not long before the wound was skilfully bound up and the flow of blood stopped.

But still the rancher's eyes did not open and the Kid rose to his feet, his face almost haggard with anxiety and uncertainty. The colonel's horse was gone, galloping madly back down the trail to Kicking Mule. Side-Kicker stood waiting; but to lift the wounded man to the saddle and lead him back to the cow-town, was impossible—the movement would have cost the rancher his life. Only in a litter could he be moved from the spot and live—even if that would save him.

What do you do a question that beat the Kid, accustomed as he was to emergencies and dealing with them. To leave the rancher where he was and gallop back to Kicking Mule for help was his first thought, but he could not leave the wounded man alone, lying insensible in the trail at the mercy of Black George if he should return to finish his work; at the mercy of the savage coyotes of the chaparral. He could not leave him—he had to stand by him. Yet help to carry him either to the cow-town or to his ranch was urgently needed; and the trail was lonely—no man was likely to be riding it till morning.

The Kid stood in doubt.

As he stood there came from the shadows of the brush the long-drawn howl of a coyote, answered at once by howls from different directions.

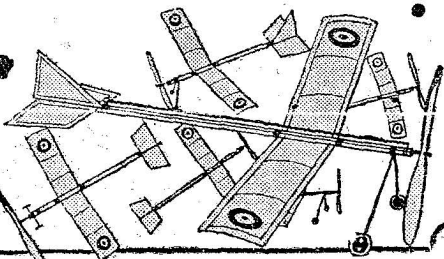
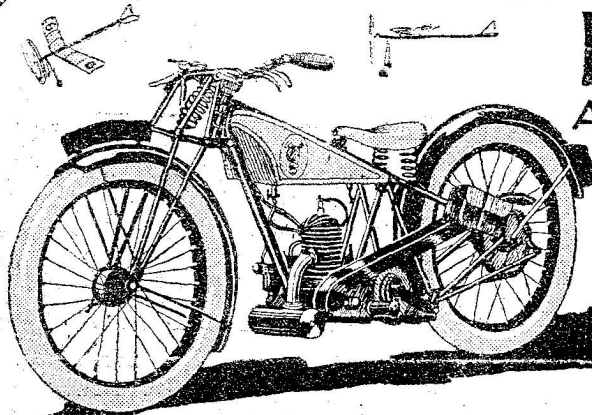
That settled it for the Kid. He had to remain and watch over the man who lay insensible at his feet, and long for dawn.

THE END.

(Some tight corner this, for the Kid. But he's been in worse and got away. See next week's roaring yarn of the West!)

LOOK—!

AMAZING COMPETITION OFFER
TO YOU
and it's **FREE!**



1ST PRIZE REX-ACME

MOTOR-BIKE

For full details of our Topping Prizes—
See Page 18 of this Issue.

AND **50 MODEL PLANES**

“WARNEFORD DEMON” Tractor Planes,
Supplied by Messrs. Wm. APPLEBY, of
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.

HERE'S a ripping new competition for you, and one in which every fellow has an equal opportunity of winning the superb first prize—which is nothing less than a “Rex-Acme” Motor-Cycle—ready for the road. There is nothing at all to pay, and winners *must* be found for the prizes. So don't hesitate—come in and start winning NOW!

The contest is as simple as A. B. C. All you have to do is to solve a few easy puzzles denoting boys' Christian names, names which boys use every day in speaking to one another. Take the first puzzle, for instance—it clearly portrays its name WILLIAM and that name has been filled in for you. In the same way see if you can solve the seven remaining puzzles. They are all thoroughly easy, but to make the contest fair and equal for every competitor, we give you on page 13 the Full List of Names in which you can find the solution to every puzzle throughout the entire contest. So you really only have to fit the right name to each picture.

As you find the answers write them **IN INK** in the spaces provided underneath. Then cut out this set and keep it until next week, when the second set will appear. The competition will last for four weeks in all, and with the final set full directions for the sending in of your entries will be given.

RULES (which must be strictly adhered to).

THE “Rex-Acme” Motor-Cycle will be awarded to the reader whose solution of the four sets of “Who's Who” puzzles are correct or most nearly correct—the 50 Model Aeroplanes following in order of merit.

In the event of ties the Editor reserves the right to divide the value of the prizes as he thinks best, but no competitor may receive more than one prize. The Editor's decision will be final and binding. You may send in as many attempts as you like, but only complete attempts made out **IN INK** on the “Who's Who” picture-sets, Nos. 1 to 4, inclusive, will be considered.

Only one name may be written under each picture. Entries mutilated or bearing alterations or alternative solutions will be disqualified. No correspondence will be allowed. Proof of posting will not be accepted as proof of delivery, and no responsibility can be taken for entries lost, or mislaid, or delayed in the post or otherwise.

Employees of the proprietors of the **POPULAR** and of “Modern Boy,” in which the contest is also running, must not compete.

| "WHOS WHO" | | SET I. | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|---|
| 1. W I L L I A M | 2. J A C K | 3. E D N R | 4. H U |
| 5. F R I D A Y J A N 3 | 6. M P | 7. L V | 8. G O O D K I N G W E N C E S L A S |

You can find the answers to all these Pictures in the List of Names on Page 13!