OUR ROARING WESTERN TALE, STARRING THE RIO KID, OUTLAW!

The CRAFTER!

By Ralph Redway.

The Rio Kid knows little about "high finance," but he does know how to pull a gun and play the straight game. This knowledge he passes on to John B. Irons, financier—with surprising results!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Kid Scents Trouble!

THE Rio Kid turned his mustang into the corral, and from the gate stood looking over the smiling valley of El Ojo del Oro. It was a pleasant enough view that met the Kid's eyes—a wide-sweeping valley, fertile, fruitful, enclosed by steep mountains that shut off the outer world of Mexico. Only bridle-paths and mule-tracks led over those rugged hills from the secluded valleys; and every ounce of gold that was carried from the mine, every stick of machinery that was brought to it, had to be borne on mule-back. The valley was smiling, fertile; its pastoral peace and beauty scarred only in one place, where the mine-shaft opened and the mine buildings stood.

It was sunset now, and work at the mine had stopped. Mexican workmen—dusky, good-tempered, far from energetic—loafed away towards the little aldea grouped around the wooden bridge over the stream that intersected the valley. The Kid watched them idly as they went. The boy puncher from Texas had no great liking for "*Greasers*"; but since he had sojourned in their country he had come to understand the Mexicans a little better than before, and he was losing some of his prejudices.

For two or three weeks now the Kid had been hanging on at El Ojo del Oro, a guest in the Casa Calhoun. He liked Charley Calhoun, the young owner of the mine, and a spell of rest in this secluded spot, after his wanderings, suited him. But the Kid was beginning to feel restless again. The mining country had no great attractions for him; it was the cow country in the west for which he had been heading when he had fallen in with Calhoun. And the Kid, as he stood at the gate of the corral, looking over the verdant valley, was thinking that it was about time that he hit the trail again. In fact, it was only one consideration that had kept him so long at El Ojo. From beyond the barrier of mountains that circled the valley rumours came from the outer world of revolutionary disturbances—common enough in Mexico. If the trouble came near to El Ojo, it was likely enough that the mine-owner might need the help of a galoot like the Kid; and so he lingered.

From the distant hillside a horseman came riding down into the valley—tiny in the distance—heading for the aldea. The Kid's eyes fell curiously upon him. Even at the distance he saw that the new comer was not a Mexican; and "Gringoes" were extremely uncommon in that remote spot in the heart of the Mexican mountains. It was hot; and the horseman, as he rode, had taken off his hat, and was fanning himself with it; and the sun shone on a bald head that reflected the light in a way that made the Kid smile. The horseman rode on to the village at a quick trot, passed through it, crossed the wooden bridge, and came riding on towards the mine. Evidently he was coming to Calhoun's house—a man from the States calling on Calhoun, the Kid figured. The Kid, loafing by the corral, still watched him as he came nearer and nearer. He had replaced his hat now; and under its brim the Kid saw a hard, lean, brown face, with a sharp nose and a square jaw—not a face that the Kid liked.

The horseman sighted the Kid by the corral, swerved a little, and rode towards him. He pulled in his horse, and fixed his eyes—small and hard, of a flinty grey—on the tanned face of the boy puncher from Frio.

"You Calhoun?" he asked, in a rasping voice.

"Guess again!" answered the Kid.

The man eyed him sharply.

"I reckoned there was only one American here," he said. "If you're not Calhoun, who are you?"

Before the Kid could answer, he went on:

"From what I've heard, Coldcutter, the mine manager, has gone over the range. He ain't here?"

"Not any," agreed the Kid. "That guy, he's gone over a thousand-foot cliff, and must have struck pesky hard when he got to the bottom. No, he sure ain't here."

"Well, who are you?"

"You can call me Kid Carfax, if you want."

"Friend of Calhoun?"

"Yep."

"What are you *doing* here?"

"Jest at this minute," drawled the Kid, "I'm listening to a whole heap of pesky questions from a guy I've never seen before, and don't know."

"That's soon remedied," said the horseman. "You're talking to John B. Irons."

"Sho!" said the Kid.

The horseman spoke his name, as if he expected it to be familiar to the Kid, and, indeed, to anyone who heard it. But it was quite new to the puncher from Frio. He had never heard of John B. Irons.

"You don't know that name?" asked the rider.

"Not a small piece!" drawled the Kid.

"I guess Calhoun will know it!" said John B. Irons, rather grimly. "Is he at the house?"

"I reckon so."

Mr. Irons rode on towards the Casa Calhoun, the Kid staring after him. He had not liked the man's looks at a distant view; he liked them still less at a close view. He could not help having a hunch that Irons' visit boded trouble, though in what way he could not guess. Trouble had been expected, more or less, from the revolutionists, if the rumours of disturbance that filtered across the mountain passes were well-founded. But John B. Irons, the Kid figured, was a more dangerous guy than any tattered Mexican patriot. The Kid had not travelled in Mexico so long without learning that many of the internal upheavels in that country were worked by Americans for commercial purposes; and he reckoned that John B. Irons was one of those guys who fished in troubled waters.

The Kid walked slowly towards the house.

He found Mr. Irons' horse tied up;

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and Mr. Irons himself in the veranda, with Calhoun. He was seated in a cane chair, disposing of a long drink, while Charley Calhoun waited politely for him to state his business. Calhoun smiled to the Kid, and beckoned to him to come in. The Kid came in and sat on the rail.

Irons glanced at him sharply, and then at Calhoun.

"Carfax your pardner, Mr. Calhoun?" he asked.

"Not exactly—jest a friend," said the young man from San Antone.

"I guess my business is private."

The Kid half-rose.

"Stay where you are, Kid!" said Calhoun. "I reckon I haven't any business here that is private from you."

The Kid nodded, and resumed his seat on the rails. The two were Texans; and Mr. Irons was an American of the hardest breed; and Americans were not loved by men of the Lone Star State. Both of them already had a feeling of hostility towards the bald-headed man with the sharp nose and the vice-like jaw.

Mr. Irons set down his glass.

"I guess I'll come down to business, then," he said. "I'm here to buy your mine, Mr. Calhoun."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
A Business Proposition!

THE Kid started a little. Calhoun stared blankly.

"Buy the mine?" repeated Calhoun.

"Yep."

"There's some mistake, I guess," said Calhoun, with a smile. "The mine is not for sale, Mr. Irons. You've been misinformed, I reckon."

"Forget it!" said Mr. Irons crisply. "Nary mistake! I've ridden over from Taxillo to make you the offer—and a durned long trail it was, too. I reckoned it was the easiest way and the most peaceful, now that Coldcutter's gone up."

"You knew the manager?" asked Calhoun.

"Plenty," answered Mr. Irons. "And I guess that the way he went out calls for some inquiry, if you ask me."

"Nothing secret about it," answered Charley Calhoun. "I'm the owner of the mine, and I came over here from Texas to take charge. Coldcutter had been robbing the mine for years; and he laid a trap for me when I came, to wipe me out. Kid Carfax saved my life, and Coldcutter went over the cliff instead of me. The whole matter was reported to the alcalde of the town here, and he is satisfied."

"I guess you've got that alcalde in your pocket. I guess a hundred pesos would make him satisfied about any old thing."

Calhoun laughed.

"Very likely," he agreed. "But you don't mean that you've come here as a friend of my late manager, to kick up a rookus, do you? You sure don't look like a galoot to come a-shooting."

"I ain't worrying about Coldcutter any. I'm here to make you an offer for the mine. Name your figure."

"I've not thought of selling."

"You better!" advised Mr. Irons. "Coldcutter was in with the local wire-pullers; you ain't. Coldcutter was a friend of mine; you ain't. Coldcutter could carry on; you can't! What'll you do if a mob of revolutionaries come humping across the hills into this valley? I guess your workmen would hit the horizon pretty quick. I guess your house would go up in smoke. I reckon that mine would shut down, and stay shut. You get me?"

Calhoun looked at him curiously.

"You think there's danger of that?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"Yet you offer to buy the mine?"

"I can work it to keep them guys clear," answered Mr. Irons coolly. "You may not be wise to it, but in this region I'm the big noise. I've got Government officials and revolutionary leaders on my pay-roll. They dance to my tune. You ain't a baby, and you don't want telling that most Mexican revolutions are worked from New York. I'm a big man here, and there's bigger men behind me back home in the states. Sell out and clear before you hit a lot of trouble. See?"

"Great gophers!" said the Kid.

Calhoun's handsome face hardened.

"Let's have it clear," he said. "So long as Coldcutter managed the mine you and your bunch were willing to leave El Ojo alone, Mr. Irons?"

"Yep! He was one of us. You ain't!"

"He robbed the mine of thousands of dollars a year, as I've found out since I took control. Did you come in on shares?"

John B. Irons smiled.

"Now you're asking questions," he said. "Comin' down to cases, when Coldcutter was here, El Ojo was as good as ours. Now he's gone up the flume, and you've took control, as you say. That don't suit us. You want to get back to Texas. Raisin' cows is your long suit, I guess. Go back to Texas an' raise cows. Leave Mexican mining propositions to the guys who understand the game. You get me?"

"Quite! I won't sell."

"Guess again," urged Mr. Irons. "You're hunting trouble. I'm offering ten thousand dollars for this mine."

Calhoun stared.

"Less than the profit on a year's output!" he said.

"Correct! But if you get five hundred patriots ranging this here valley, where's your output?" asked John B. Irons.

"Is that a threat?"

"No; jest business. Yep or nope?"

"Nope!"

"You're sure foolish," said Mr. Irons. "I'll give you time to think it over. You send a galoot within three days to my office at Taxillo and say you'll sell. You'll save a lot of trouble."

"Shucks!" said the Kid. "It boils down to this—that you've got to have the mine at a give-away price, Mr. Irons, or else you'll let loose that bunch of revolutionists you've got in your pocket and knock the whole thing to pieces?"

"You can sure put it like that," assented Mr. Irons calmly.

"Well, if I was boss here——" began the Kid.

He broke off.

Calhoun smiled.

"What'd you do, Kid, if you was boss?" he asked.

"I reckon I'd take my quirt to a guy that offered me terms like that," grunted the Kid.

Calhoun laughed.

"I guess Mister Irons ain't so all-fired powerful as he allows," he remarked. "I reckon he's trying to pull a bluff."

"Forget it!" snapped Irons.

Calhoun rose to his feet.

"Bluff or not, I guess I'm fed-up with you, you pesky polecat! Beat it out of here pronto, or I'll sure ask the Kid to handle his quirt on your hide!"

"You wouldn't have to ask twice," said the Kid.

John B. Irons shrugged his shoulders.

"That's your answer?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"I guess I'll beat it, then," said Mr. Irons. "I've no use for a quirt, and I ain't come here a-shooting. That ain't my long suit! I reckon you'll be sorry." He moved to the veranda steps, and then turned back and paused. "You look here, you gink——"

"You got your quirt handy, Kid?" asked Calhoun.

John B. Irons hurried out of the veranda without finishing his remarks. He mounted his horse in hot haste, and, shaking his fist at the two youngsters, rode off towards the aldea.

The two Texans watched him. Calhoun was smiling contemptuously; but the Kid's face was dark and serious. His hand lingered over the walnut butt of a gun, but he shook his head and relinquished it.

"You figure that guy was talking cold business, Kid?" asked the young owner of the El Ojo mine.

The Kid nodded.

"Business, from the word go!" he answered.

"I reckoned he was shooting off a lot of gas," said Calhoun. "He sure is some hombre, if he can pull off a game like that. I'm putting it down as a bluff."

"Mebbe!" said the Kid slowly. "But I reckon it was the goods. He was sure in cahoots with your manager here to loot the mine. Now Coldcutter's gone he don't reckon on losing on it. I guess there is going to be a whole heap of trouble here, Mr. Calhoun."

"You got time to hit the trail and leave me to it, feller," said Calhoun, with a smile.

The Kid shook his head.

"Afore I sighted that durned pizen skunk I was figuring on hitting the trail," he said. "Now I reckon I'm staying."

And the Kid stayed.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Patriots!

THE trouble was not long in coming.

Three days elapsed, but no messenger went over the mountain paths from the lonely valley to the grafter's office at Taxillo.

If John B. Irons waited for a word of surrender, he waited in vain.

Charley Calhoun was not figuring on selling the mine for a tenth of its value, and he did not believe that the grafter could carry out his threats.

Just then there were three, if not four, revolutions going on in different parts of Mexico, and one of them had burst out in the Taxillo province.

Fierce fighting and slaughter were reported in American newspapers; but as a rule a casualty list of three or four was rare. Mexican warfare, as the Kid knew, was generally on comic-operatic lines. Numerous bodies of Government troops and rebels would advance and retreat, march and counter-march, without any great harm being done to anyone.

If El Ojo was occupied by the rebels, doubtless they would be dislodged sooner or later by Federal troops. There would be plenty of shooting, sound and smoke, and that would be all. Nobody was likely to get hurt.

But while they were there matters would be serious for the men at the mine.

And on the fourth day after the visit of John B. Irons there was great excitement in the aldea. The rebels were coming!

The next day they came.

General Xerero—who had been a

muleteer, and had risen to military command as a revolutionist—came down the mountain paths at the head of three or four hundred ragged patriots, and occupied the village.

From the veranda of the Casa, Calhoun watched the tattered array streaming into the aldea.

"I guess they'll leave the mine alone!" he remarked.

"Not if John B. Irons knows it!" said the Kid grimly.

"You figure that he's got Xerero on his pay-roll?"

"Sure! That's why the galoot's here at El Ojo."

"I guess we'll see," said Calhoun, still incredulous.

They were not long in seeing.

The next morning not a single workman turned up at the mine. Evidently "General" Xerero had intervened to that extent.

Later in the day the general rode out from the aldea to the mine. He was a fat, swarthy man, and he looked, as the Kid expressed it, "some" general. He wore a big sombrero, an officer's tunic, leather calzoneros, and had a pair of large, rusty spurs strapped to his feet, which were naked. Also, he looked as if he had not washed for several months, which was probably the case. But he was a polite and good-humoured revolutionist, and he saluted Calhoun with great courtesy.

He was desolated, he explained in flowing Spanish; but exigencies of State required him to take provisional possession of the mine; and the two Gringos were free to leave the country as soon as they liked.

The mine would be, for the present, shut down; but such stock of gold as might happen to be on hand would be taken charge of by the general himself—to be strictly accounted for at the end of the great and glorious revolution."

"Yep; I guess I'm wise how you'd account for it, you gink!" remarked the Rio Kid. "You wouldn't even go so far as to buy yourself a pair of boots or a cake of soap, sure!"

Fortunately, the general did not understand English.

"Pitch it to him in his own lingo, Kid," said Calhoun.

"What'll I tell him?" asked the Kid.

"Tell him we're not going, and that we're not handing over the mine, and that we'll shoot to kill if any of his dirty crew come messing about this way."

The Kid laughed.

"Feller," he said, "I'm with you all the way; but jest at present this revolutionary army holds all the cards. If we had the old Double-Bar outfit here to back us up I'd undertake to wipe them out to the last grease-spot; but two galoots can't do it, feller. We've got to talk turkey, and keep 'em quiet till the Federal troops come along. They may happen in any day, especially if you get a messenger through with a letter and a banknote in it."

"They ain't taking over the mine!" said Calhoun stubbornly. "This unwashed gink is playing the game for that guy Irons. I guess I see that clear enough now."

"Sure! That guy is sittin' in his office at Taxillo, like a dog-goned spider in a web, pulling the strings," said the Kid. "This ain't a new game in Mexico, nohow. These Mexican revolutions wouldn't amount to a row of beans if there wasn't American dollars behind them. I guess I savvy that you'd like to pull a gun and blow this guy's roof off——"

"I sure would."

"But it ain't any use," said the Kid. "There's two or three hundred of them in El Ojo, and more to come if that ain't enough. John B. Irons has got the dollars; and there ain't a guy in Mexico that wouldn't rather loaf around with a gun, and call himself a patriot, than work. When the troops get this way they'll have to hit the horizon; and until then, feller, we got to talk turkey, or they'll loot the mine and burn the buildings, and raise thunder generally."

"I guess I'll leave it to you, Kid," said Calhoun, shrugging his shoulders. "But I ain't letting up on the mine. I wish I'd pulled a gun on John B. when he was around here."

The Kid talked to the general in Spanish.

He found General Xerero quite reasonable.

For a contribution to the revolutionary war-chest of five hundred pesos, the general agreed to give the Gringos three days' grace.

Then he stayed only to receive the pesos before riding away. No doubt the pocket of the general's ragged calzoneros represented the revolutionary war-chest.

"And now, Kid?" said Charley Calhoun, as the "general" rode back to the aldea, a richer man than he had ever been before, in his career either as a muleteer or a military chief.

"I guess we've stalled them off," said the Kid. "That's the only way in Mexico in revolution time—you pay them to keep off till the thing fizzles out. Why, bless your little boots, sometimes a mining company or an oil company will have to hand out a bag of pesos to six or seven revolutionary generals, one after another, according to which hungry thief happens to be in the vicinity."

Calhoun laughed.

"We've got off cheaper than that," he remarked.

"Sure," said the Kid; "and if John B. would let up, I guess we'd pull out all right."

"But he sure won't, I reckon."

"No," said the Kid thoughtfully. "He won't. As soon as he hears that the mine ain't taken over by that great and glorious revolutionary big-wig, he will horn in, pronto. And I guess Xerero will jump when John B. pulls the strings again. And I opine that his next jump will land him right here."

"He will get some shooting before he jumps in," said Calhoun, between his teeth. "I'd rather see the mine buildings burnt, and the mine choked up, than hand it over!"

"Good!" said the Kid. "If it comes to a cinch, we'll show these jaspers some shooting, feller. But we've gained time—and the next move is up to John B. I reckon he won't be long in horning in again. We got to handle him when he does."

And the Kid's brow was wrinkled in thought. The crew of ragged patriots who occupied El Ojo del Oro could be dealt with—that kind of problem was common enough in Mexico; but only if John B. Irons ceased to pull the strings. That was the real problem.

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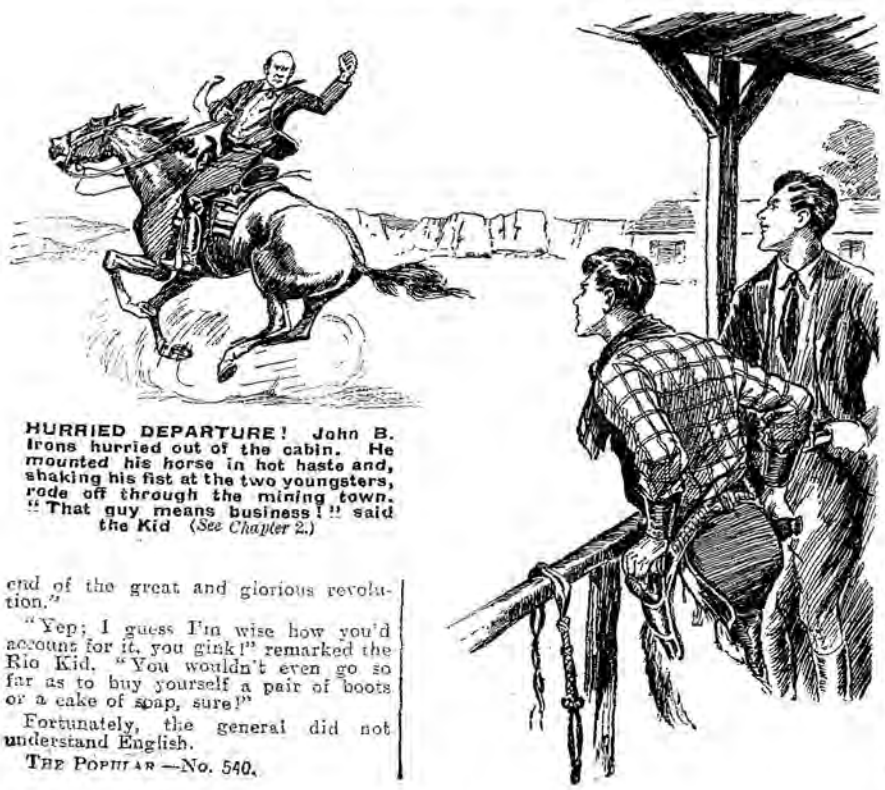
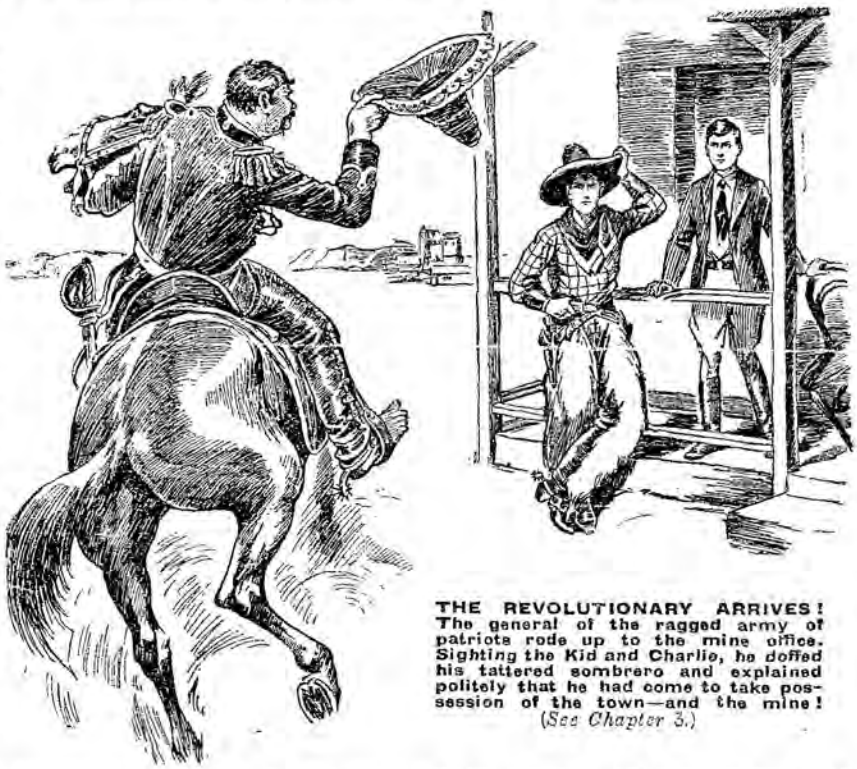
And the outcome of the Kid's deep cogitations on the subject was that a messenger rode over from the valley to the grafter's office at Taxillo, with a message that the mine-owner was willing to sell—a message that made John B. Irons grin when he received it.



HURRIED DEPARTURE! John B. Irons hurried out of the cabin. He mounted his horse in hot haste and, shaking his fist at the two youngsters, rode off through the mining town. "That guy means business!" said the Kid (See Chapter 2.)



THE REVOLUTIONARY ARRIVES! **The general of the ragged army of patriots rode up to the mine office. Sighting the Kid and Charlie, he doffed his tattered sombrero and explained politely that he had come to take possession of the town—and the mine!** (*See Chapter 3.*)

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Another Business Proposition!

"HE'S coming!" drawled the Kid.

It was the third day; and in the sunny afternoon a hard-faced man rode across the valley of El Ojo del Oro, and headed for the mine.

The Rio Kid watched him curiously as he came.

John B. Irons had lost little time.

The grafter had had no doubt that when he let loose the mob of rebels on the valley the mine-owner would come to his senses, as he regarded it, and sell out for what he could get.

Ten thousand dollars was a mere song for the El Ojo mine; but it was better than nothing. Once the mine was taken over by the rebel general it would be worth nothing to the owner.

John B. Irons was not anxious for that to happen, if it could be avoided. As the prospective owner of the mine, he did not want damage to be done to the buildings and the expensive machinery. He had hoped, and expected, that the arrival of "General" Xerero and his tattered crew would scare Calhoun into selling while there was yet time. The message of surrender had not surprised him in the least.

So, in a cheerful mood, John B. Irons rode over to El Ojo to conclude that business transaction.

Once the mine was his, by regular sale, it would be easy to turn the crew of patriots in some other direction—"General" Xerero being on his payroll, as he described it.

Mr. Irons arrived at the house, and a peon took away his horse, and he was shown in. Calhoun was waiting to receive him; and after he had entered the Rio Kid lounged into the room.

The grafter gave the Kid a quick, suspicious look. With Calhoun he expected dealing to be easy; but he had suspicions of the Kid. Somehow, the boy puncher from Frio made him feel uneasy.

But the Kid's expression was polite and bland, and he gave the man from Taxillo a genial nod.

"I guess I'm glad to see you, Mr. Irons," *said the Kid amiably.* "I don't come on in this deal, excepting as a friend of Mr. Calhoun; but sure would like this leetle affair to be settled up without a whole heap of trouble, and shooting."

"Easy enough!" snapped Irons. "I've received your message, Mr. Calhoun, and I'm here to settle the business. You've decided to sell?"

"Carfax advises me to sell," assented Calhoun.

Irons raised his brows.

"Well, that's sure sensible of him, and a friend's advice," he said. "I guess he can see you'll do better raising cows in Texas than running a mine in Mexico."

"Sure!" said Calhoun "I'm taking his advice. The fact is, I'd be glad to sell the mine and quit."

He smiled as he spoke.

Irons smiled, too He had expected prompt surrender from Calhoun, once the revolutionaries were in the valley. Somehow he had figured that if resistance came, it would be inspired by that puncher from Frio But Kid Carfax seemed to have inspired the surrender.

"Well, I guess that's satisfactory all round," said Irons. "But I got to tell you that the price has gone down. I'm offering seven thousand dollars for the mine to-day."

"Sho!" said the Kid. "But it's sure as good a mine as ever, Mr. Irons."

"Patriots cost money!" said John B. succinctly.

The Kid laughed.

"You've said it," he agreed. "It's a long trip across the sierra here, and I guess them jaspers wouldn't have made it if you hadn't pushed hard. And now they're here they won't march again, unless you hand out a little more."

"You know the game, I guess," said Irons dryly. "Well, to come down to cases——"

"To come down to cases," said the Kid deliberately. "You reckon that the price of this mine has gone down?"

"Yep."

"That's where we don't cinch," said the Kid. "According to this side, the price has gone up!"

Irons stared at him.

"I've sure advised my friend Calhoun to sell," said the Kid easily. "This ain't no country for him; and, personal, I wouldn't give an acre of Texas for all Mexico. My idea is, that if he can get a fair price for th mine, it's good business to sell and quit."

"That's it," assented Calhoun, still smiling. "All I want is a fair price, Mr. Irons, and I'll sure be glad to hit the trail to Texas."

"Seven thousand dollars, and not a cent over!" said John B. Irons, his jaw closing like a vice.

"Ninety thousand, and not a cent less!" remarked the Kid.

Irons laughed contemptuously.

"What's put that figure into your head?" he asked.

"That's the fair price," said the Kid cheerfully. "I guess I know something about mines. I've run a mine in Arizona, in my time. Why, if this mine was over the border in safe territory, it would be worth half a million dollars. In this country, with pesky patriots on the rampage, and some grafters pulling the strings behind them, it goes cheap. But ninety thousand dollars will see my friend Calhoun nicely fixed to start a big ranch in Texas. You buying?"

Irons rose from his chair.

"We're wasting time," he said curtly.

"That mean nope?" asked the Kid.

"You've said it!"

"Every time you refuse, the price goes up," said the Kid. "That offer is now withdrawn, Mr. Irons. The price of this mine, at the present moment, is ninety-five thousand dollars."

Irons stared at him.

"Loco? he asked.

"I guess not. You may as well sit down, feller," drawled the Kid. "You ain't quitting till you've bought this mine!"

"What?" roared Irons.

"Don't I speak plain?" asked the Kid patiently. "Carry me home to die! You was powerful keen on buying this here mine. You let loose a mob of jaspers on us, to make Calhoun sell. You've got it fixed on us so that we've got to sell, or see the mine go to blue blazes. What you grousing about? We're selling, and you're buying."

Irons breathed hard.

"Then this was a trick to get me here!" he hissed.

"Where's the trick?" asked the Kid innocently. "We sent you a message that Calhoun was willing to sell. He's willing to sell. He's told you so, and I'm telling you so. It's a question of price. As a square man, you'll be willing to pay the figure Calhoun could get in the open market, if you wasn't working graft agin him. What?"

"You dog-goned geck——"

"If you ain't a square man," continued the Kid urbanely, "you got to act like you was one, for once. Got that?"

"Let me pass!" roared the grafter, striding to the door.

The Rio Kid was leaning his back on

the door, and he did not stir. He only smiled at the man from Taxillo.

"Forget it," he said lightly.

Like a flash, the grafter's right hand went to his hip-pocket.

Bang!

He did not see the Kid draw a gun. The movement was too swift for the eye to follow it.

But the gun was in the Kid's hand, and it roared as the grafter drew.

There was a yell from John B. Irons.

His revolver went spinning to the floor, smashed away from his grip by the bullet, and for a moment he fancied his hand had gone with it. But it was only numbed by the shock.

The Kid laughed gently.

"You freeze on to graft, and let gun-play alone, feller," he advised. "That ain't your strong holt, nohow. Sit down!"

"If I don't get back to the aldea, they'll come, sure enough," said Irons. "You can't get away with this game."

"Mebbe!" drawled the Kid. "Mebbe! But they won't find you here, John B. Irons, if they come! Not alive, feller! You ain't pulling any more strings in this here burg, John B. If them patriots come along here to attack us, the first thing they'll see will be John B. Irons hanging over the gate—as dead as Abe Lincoln. You better hope they won't come!"

The grafter set his teeth hard.

"You'll get nothing out of me!" he said.

"Nope?" asked the Kid gently. "I'm sure sorry for that, feller. You see, you got things fixed so that Calhoun has got to sell this mine, and fixed so that he can't sell it to anybody but you. There's only one other way out. If you couldn't pull the strings any more, I guess we could fix it with them jaspers at the aldea then. I should sure hate to spill the juice of a dirty coyote like you in this here shebang; but I reckon a rope can be found. I've lent a hand at a necktie party afore, and the galoot sure wasn't such a pizen skunk as you are, John B. I guess you've figured on being hanged some day?"

"You—you'd never dare!" gasped Irons.

The Kid laughed.

The grafter was caught in his own snare, and, with all the cunning he had learned in a long career of graft, he could not see a way out.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
The Kid Hits the Trail!

JOHN B. IRONS passed that night in a cellar deep beneath the Casa Calhoun. The next morning the Kid rode into the aldea to carry a letter from the Senor Irons to the General Xerero. The letter contained instructions to the patriot general to march immediately out of El Ojo de Oro, and a draft on the Banco de Taxillo for a thousand pesos, signed by John B. Irons. The Kid did not explain that both the letter and the draft had been written under the persuasion of his quirt. The Kid had a heavy hand with a quirt, as John B. Irons had found to his sorrow.

General Xerero and his tattered army marched promptly, the general chiefly anxious to cash that draft on the Banco de Taxillo, with which, as he concluded, his employer had so generously rewarded his services.

Before noon the last ragged patriot had disappeared over the mountain paths.

John B.'s allies were gone, but John B. remained.

He remained in the deep cellar under the Casa Calhoun, on a spare diet. Three days of this was enough for John B.

The Kid explained to him, with cheery urbanity, that he had not by any means given up the idea of lynching the grafter over the gate. But he was willing to give him a chance to come to terms first. Whether the Kid would ultimately carry out that dire threat, John B. could not feel sure.

And his affairs in Taxillo needed his attention. The robbery of the El Ojo Mine was only one of the many activities of that enterprising Yankee business man.

He realised that in the Rio Kid he had hit up against a proposition of unaccustomed toughness. And he came to terms.

The mine of El Ojo del Oro was sold to John B. Irons for ninety-five thousand dollars. John B. still remained at the Casa Calhoun—though in a more comfortable apartment—until a draft for the cash had been duly presented and honoured at the bank in San Antonio, Texas, and news had come through that it was O.K. The Kid trusted John B. exactly as much as he trusted a rattlesnake, and he gave him no chance for further trickery.

After which the mine was duly handed over to John B., and Charley Calhoun and the Rio Kid rode out of the valley of El Ojo del Oro together—the former to take the trail for his own country, the Kid to linger in Mexico yet awhile.

THE END

(Another Topping Tale of the Rio Kid next week, chums!)

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