

THE WESTERNERS

"Thought you wasn't no tenderfoot. Ever hit the trail?"

"Not on those plains. In the woods many times."

"We ain't takin' but damn few," went on Buckley dissertatively, "and them that goes has to be right on to their job. No women; good cattle. That's our motto. Reckon you all fills the bill. Cyan't tell. Got to ask the others."

Lafond knew that this, from a man of Buckley's stamp, was distinct encouragement. At the moment, the other two members came up. Buckley, in a few words, told them of the newcomer's desires and qualifications.

Billy looked him over briefly.

"Yo're a breed, ain't you?" he inquired with refreshing directness. "I thought so." He turned to Buckley, with the air of ignoring Lafond altogether. "That bars him," he said, with a little laugh.

"He's got a mighty good line of brones," Buckley objected.

"Don't care if his hosses *are* good," stated Billy decidedly.

"He's a breed, an' that's enough. I seen plenty of that crew and I ain't goin' to have one in the same country with me, if I can help it, let alone the same outfit."

He began to whistle and rummage in the back of the wagon, with a charming obliviousness to the presence of the subject of his remarks.

"That settles it," said Buckley curtly and indifferently.

The half-breed, his nervous hands deep in his side pockets, walked slowly to his horse. Then, in sudden access of rapid motion, he leaped on the animal's back and disappeared.