

THE QUIRT

CHAPTER ONE

LITTLE FISH

QUIRT CREEK flowed sluggishly between willows which sagged none too gracefully across its deeper pools, or languished beside the rocky stretches that were bone dry from July to October, with a narrow channel in the center where what water there was hurried along to the pools below. For a mile or more, where the land lay fairly level in a platter-like valley set in the lower hills, the mud that rimmed the pools was scored deep with the tracks of the "TJ up-and-down" cattle, as the double monogram of Hunter and Johnson was called.

A hard brand to work, a cattleman would tell you. Yet the TJ up-and-down herd never seemed to increase beyond a niggardly three hundred or so, though the Quirt ranch was older than its lordly neighbors, the Sawtooth Cattle Company,