

NORTH OF THE LAW

CHAPTER I

THE STAKE OF LIFE

THE bell of the river steamer *Dawson* clanged farewell to the Mounted Police post at the Big Salmon. Cast-off lines swished shrilly through the crisp autumn air. Groaning frosty protests, the gangplank came in. As the Upper Yukon boat swung her nose against the current, a resonant shout rose from those on her cluttered decks. Far farers these, bronzed men and huge, and though outward bound, still clad in parkas, furs, and mackinaws. Off every Klondike creek were they foregathered, glutted with gold, kings of Eldorado. Wedged between mountainous dunnage and freight, shoulder to shoulder with mongrel Thron-Diuck savages and leg to leg with savage Malemute mongrels, the horde of homegoers blackened the steamer from stem to stern. Not a foot of space was left above or below. Men must eat where they stood, and sleep beneath the aurora and the Arctic stars.

From the ragged shore, making strange contrast to the joyful clamour of this homefaring crowd, came