



## Jack London

I AM A WESTERNER, despite my English name," Jack London (1876–1916) once declared. "I realize that much of California's romance is passing away, and I intend to see to it that I, at least, shall preserve as much of that romance as is possible for me." Now, more than two generations since his death, there is little question about London's literary success: "that romance" to which he refers has been preserved in his legend as well as in his works.

The legend is universally familiar: Jack London the adventurer and literary pioneer, Jack London the hard-hitting, hard-drinking, hard-living individualist. All the favorite clichés that have been used to describe the spirit of the American West were incarnated in the London persona, and his public image was as spectacular as that of any of his fictional heroes.

Born only fourteen years before the 1890 census marked the closing of the frontier, coming of age during that decade called "the watershed of American history," and dying less than a year before the United States entered the first World War, Jack London symbolized the passing of an era—perhaps, in a spiritual and intellectual sense, the most crucial era in American history. His generation was the last fully possessed of that "coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness," that "restless, nervous energy," that "dominant individualism," that "buoyancy and exuberance" which, according to Frederick Jackson Turner, have defined the American character as shaped by the frontier experience. Aggressively optimistic, courageous, bluntly honest, extroverted, and utterly unpretentious, London was himself a product of that experience.

No other writer has more dramatically incorporated into his own career the richly varied elements of the American dream. Born out of wedlock to spiritualist Flora Wellman and itinerant astrologer William Henry Chaney, who deserted her when she revealed her pregnancy, Jack (christened "John Griffith") London achieved a success more fabulous than that of any Horatio Alger hero. "Prince of the Oyster Pirates" on San Francisco Bay at the age of fifteen, vagabond "Sailor Kid" at the age of sixteen, able-bodied seaman aboard the sealing schooner *Sophia Sutherland* at seventeen, member of the Western division of Coxey's Army of the Unemployed and "profesh" hobo at eighteen, notorious "Boy Socialist" of Oakland at nineteen, Klondike argonaut at twenty-one, "Kipling of the American short story" at twenty-four, ace war correspondent and world-famous novelist be-

fore he was thirty, first author ever to earn a million dollars from his writings—these are but a few of the highlights of the London legend.

But there was another, a darker, facet of London's persona. He melodramatically (and sometimes fictively) recollected his early years as clouded by poverty, solitude, insecurity, and deprivation—emotional as well as financial. "My body and soul were starved when I was a child," he complained in an early letter to his first great love, Mabel Applegarth (the model for his hero's fragile Victorian sweetheart in *Martin Eden*), recalling an incident in which hunger compelled him to steal a piece of meat from a schoolmate's lunch pail. His kindly stepfather, John London, whom Flora had married nine months after Jack's birth, was a chronic failure in small business and farming enterprises, a failure due in considerable measure to Flora's restless ambitiousness. As a result, the family was continually on the move, and Jack was forced to go to work before he finished his schooling. He sold newspapers on the Oakland waterfront, set pins in a bowling alley, scrubbed saloon floors; and as soon as he finished grade school, he started to work full time in a pickle cannery—often spending twelve to fourteen hours a day on the job. In a letter to his first publisher, Houghton Mifflin Company, he testified, "from my ninth year, with the exception of the hours spent at school (and I earned them by hard labor), my life has been one of toil." Such childhood memories, though sometimes exaggerated (we know, in fact, that while the London family sometimes had difficulty in making ends meet, they were never close to starvation), nonetheless furnished a rich background for the writer and left psychological scars on the man. At the same time it is clear that London deliberately fostered the myth of himself as the self-made American Adam, winning to respectability and success against seemingly impossible odds: it was a myth to which he committed himself absolutely. In the winter of 1898—his family and friends pressing him to get a steady job, magazine editors rejecting his manuscripts as fast as he could pawn his only decent suit, his bike, and his typewriter for postage stamps—he wrote to Mabel Applegarth, "I don't care if the whole present, all I possess, were swept away from me—I will build a new present; if I am left naked and hungry tomorrow—before I give in I will go naked and hungry; if I were a woman I would prostitute myself to all men that I would succeed—in short, I will." And, in short, he did. His resolution was prophetic. Within a month after composing that letter London's short story "To the Man on Trail" had been accepted for publication by the *Overland Monthly*; in little more than a year his work had appeared in the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly*, and Houghton Mifflin Company had contracted to publish his first book; in less than five years he would be one of America's most popular young writers, with a half-dozen books to his credit, including his best-selling masterpiece *The Call of the Wild*.

In the fascinating contrarities of his person and persona, as well as in his extraordinary popularity, London was in many ways like another western writer whose meteor overlapped his own: Mark Twain. Both were genuine folk writers—the kind of literary *kosmos* that Walt Whitman had proclaimed himself to be without ever really becoming. Moreover, both were paradoxical and paradigmatic figures shaped as much by the disruptive transitions of post-Darwinian and post-Civil War America as by the frontier influence and by memories of their childhood experiences. While both were children of the nineteenth century, they became men of the twentieth century; and their boisterous frontier spirit was prone to subversion by the malaise of the latter era, manifesting itself through such typical symptoms as disenchantment, spiritual alienation, and neurasthenic depression. The pessimistic despair of Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger* is no bleaker than the "White Logic" of London's *John Barleycorn*: "Life is apparitional, and passes. You are an apparition. Through all the apparitions that preceded you and that compose the parts of you, you rose gibbering from the evolutionary mire, and gibbering you will pass on, interfusing, permeating the procession of apparitions that will succeed you." Unlike Twain's, however, London's nihilistic moods were more transitory than chronic; and his predominant attitude was vigorously life-assertive. This characteristic optimism is nowhere more evident than in his writings about the American West, a region he envisioned progressively in symbolic and, ultimately, mythic terms.

But it was not the romance of California and the American West that inspired London's first successful literary efforts; rather, it was the call of a farther music. On July 14, 1897, the steamship *Excelsior* docked at San Francisco, disembarking forty miners who lugged a ton of gold down the gangplank. At Seattle three days later a second group carrying over two tons of gold dust and nuggets debarked from the *Portland*. Both groups had floated down the Yukon River from the Klondike to the ocean port at St. Michaels, and the wealth they brought out seemed to confirm the rumors of a fantastic bonanza in the Far North. The nation immediately went mad to be in contact with that remote country, and the Great Klondike Gold Rush was in full swing in less than a fortnight. To a people disillusioned by the Civil War, the political corruptions of "The Great Barbecue," the spreading blight of industrial exploitation and poverty, the moral hypocrisies and social affectations of the genteel mode—by all the decadence and dishonesty of what Twain had branded as "The Gilded Age"—the Klondike seemed to offer a truly golden opportunity not only to discover material riches but, perhaps even more compelling, to recapture the innocence and integrity of a past age—in short, to return to paradise. "I believed that I was about to see and take part in a most picturesque and impressive movement across the wilderness," Hamlin Garland later reminisced in *The Trail of the*

*Goldseekers*; “I believed it to be the last march of the kind which could ever come to America, so rapidly were the wild places being settled up. . . . I wished to return to the wilderness also, to forget books and theories of art and social problems, and come again face to face with the great free spaces of woods, skies, and streams.”

Jack London was among the first of the stampeders. It had been over two years since he had returned from his cross-country hoboing odyssey; those years had been crammed with intensive study and frustrated efforts to break into the literary marketplace, with nothing to show for his efforts but writer’s cramps and a drawerful of rejection slips. On July 25, 1897, Jack—with the help of his brother-in-law, Captain J. H. Shepard, who had mortgaged his home for their stake—boarded the *Umatilla* en route to the Yukon via the Dyea Beach in southern Alaska, the four-hundred-mile trek over the rugged Chilkoot Pass, through the treacherous White Horse Rapids, and downriver to the mouth of the Stewart River, where he spent most of the long Arctic winter listening to the tales that passed between the veteran “sourdoughs” and newly arrived “chechaquos”—absorbing and assimilating those wonderful materials which he would subsequently transmute into his great Northland Saga.

Any illusions London may have entertained about the Northland-as-Eden were thoroughly dissipated during that rigorous winter. In sharp contrast to the salubrious wilderness depicted by the Romantic poets and by the academic primitivists, this vast, still wilderness—portrayed in archetypal images of the White Silence throughout London’s Northland Saga—was cold, impassive, awesome, inimical to puny and insignificant man. While Nature’s wellsprings might be pure in this region, they were also frozen, providing neither warmth nor security. What the Northland did provide was a fitting backdrop for fiction written in the naturalistic mode, and London’s early stories are filled with terror and dread of this deadly landscape. Describing the psychological disintegration of one of the main characters in the story “In a Far Country,” he writes: “Everything in the Northland had that crushing effect—the absence of life and motion; the darkness; the infinite peace of the brooding land; the ghastly silence, which made the echo of each heartbeat a sacrilege; the solemn forest which seemed to guard an awful, inexpressible something, which neither word nor thought could compass.” The only serenity available to man in this frozen-hearted Eden was the serenity of death. This wilderness, London concluded, was a hostile place to be escaped *from*, not *to*. He himself escaped, suffering badly from scurvy, during the late spring of 1898, ready to resume his writing career in earnest that fall.

It would be several years later, only after the harsh reality of that experience had been sublimated through the nostalgic alembic of time—only

after he had discovered through his traumatic six weeks in the slums of London's East End that the city might be a more terrible wilderness than the Northland—only when he was safe back home with family and friends in his snug bungalow in the Piedmont hills—only then that he could afford to rhapsodize over *The Call of the Wild*. And it would be another two years, after his separation from his wife Bessie and after his new love Charmian Kittredge had rescued him from the “Long Sickness” described in *John Barleycorn*, before he would be ready to move permanently from the city to the country—and, even then, not to the real wilderness, but to the pastoral landscape surrounding the hamlet of Glen Ellen, in the Sonoma Valley, sixty miles north of San Francisco. This landscape would become the setting not only for his California romances but also for the agrarian vision to which he devoted most of his creative energies during the last decade of his life.

London's move from Oakland into the Valley of the Moon, as he lovingly called the region, was initially motivated by a sentimental pastoralism—that is, by the romantic yearning to escape the complexities of urban living, to return to the paradisaic simplicities of an idealized rural landscape. “The main thing is the country itself, and the fact that you are out of the high pressure of city life,” London wrote to his socialist friend and Oakland librarian, Frederick Irons Bamford, on May 28, 1905: “The thing is, to cease being intellectual altogether. To take delight in little things, in bugs and crawling things, the birds, the leaves, etc., etc. The thing is to get so keenly interested in decently cooking a pot of rice, that you will forget that there ever was a Socialist Revolution, or a library, or high school children getting books for collateral reading, or anything else under the sun except the one end—a decently cooked pot of rice. . . . I didn't come to Glen Ellen to see people, but to get away from people. . . .” This same temper is reflected in a story London was writing at this time—his first fiction dealing with the pastoral scene, “All Gold Canyon”—obviously inspired by his own enthusiasm for the lovely setting of the 128-acre Hill Ranch, which he purchased on June 7, the day before mailing his completed manuscript to *Century Magazine*.

“All Gold Canyon” is one of London's most significant stories. Not only does it embody some of his best lyrical description and dramatic narrative: it also demonstrates his newly awakened ecological conscience. There had been little evidence of such concern in his Alaskan stories; all his sympathies are with the brave souls who pit their heroic will against the awesome intractability of the wilderness. The gold itself is incidental, the moral fiber of the man himself being the important thing, but it is nonetheless a positive reward for those select few upon whom fate has endowed the rare combination of grit, determination, adaptability, good comradeship,

and—most important—good luck. London's bonanza kings are almost invariably men of exceptional character who have also been blessed by Special Providence. Like their Puritan forebears they see in wildness not the preservation of the world, but profit for the individual who has the strength of will to match force with force.

The main character of "All Gold Canyon," a pocket-miner simply named "Bill," is such a frontier type, possessing the best qualities of the Northland heroes: courage, decency, industriousness, a sense of fair play, and humor. But his materialistic spirit is out of harmony with the spirit of the beneficent Southland wilderness, which London introduces in the characteristic imagery of the pastoral tradition:

It was the green heart of the canyon, where the walls swerved back from the rigid plan and relieved their harshness of line by making a little sheltered nook and filling it to the brim with sweetness and roundness and softness. Here all things rested. . . .

There was no dust in the canyon. The leaves and flowers were clean and virginal. . . . Sunshine and butterflies drifted in and out among the trees. The hum of the bees and the whisper of the stream were a drifting sound. And the drifting sound and drifting color seemed to weave together in the making of a delicate and intangible fabric which was the spirit of the place.

The quietness of this western Sleepy Hollow is a far cry from the terrifying silence of the Northland Wilderness, and its spirit is unmistakably Edenic (at one point the place is called "the canyon-garden"):

It was a spirit of peace that was not of death, but of smooth-pulsing life, of quietude that was not silence, of movement that was not action, of repose that was quick with existence without being violent with struggle and travail. The spirit of the place was the spirit of the peace of the living, somnolent with the easement and content of prosperity, and undisturbed by rumors of far wars.

This spirit is abruptly broken, however, by the pocket-miner, who bursts noisily upon the scene in a cloud of dust, the metal of his hobnailed boots clanging harshly against the rocks as he monotonously chants a hymn about "them sweet hills of grace." The man is immediately struck by the loveliness of the place, but his motives are basically materialistic, not aesthetic, and he can only respond with cheap commercial clichés: "A pocket-hunter's delight an' a cayuse's paradise! Cool green for tired eyes! Pink pills for pale people ain't in it."

In London's pastoral wilderness the roles between Man and Nature are reversed from what they were in the Northland: it is Man who now becomes the savage destructive force, Nature the helpless victim. Bill pro-

ceeds methodically to desecrate the virginal canyon, digging a series of scientifically calculated holes into the gently sloping hill until he has located the secret gold-pocket. But, while discovering his treasure, the man has also brought death into the garden: the deep hole he has dug almost becomes his own grave—and does, indeed, become the grave for the dark stranger who attempts to ambush him after he has mined his gold. Even so, “All Gold Canyon” ends on a hopeful note. After the miner has departed, “. . . through the silence crept back the spirit of the place. . . . Only remained the hoof-marks in the meadow and the torn hillside to mark the boisterous trail of the life that had broken the peace of the place and passed on.”

Yet the lyrical pastoralism of “All Gold Canyon” represents only the first stage in London’s dynamic attitude toward the western landscape. His restless intelligence would not allow him to dwell long in this idyllic region without imposing his will upon the land. Shortly after purchasing the Hill Ranch, he contracted to build a magnificent barn from rock, reinforced concrete, and heavy redwood beams; and he began planting the orchard which would reach full maturity by the time he and his wife Charmian returned from their projected seven years’ cruise around the world. His own all-gold canyon was truly beautiful; he would preserve its beauty while also making it fruitful. Science, lovingly applied, could not merely preserve but enhance the best in Nature.

London’s articulation of these two seemingly opposing forces—Science and Nature—is first effected in *White Fang*, which he started writing on June 26, 1905. London explained the theme of this book in a conversation with George Wharton James:

Every atom of organic life is plastic. The finest specimens now in existence were once all pulpy infants capable of being moulded this way or that. Let the pressure be one way and we have atavism—the reversion to the wild; the other the domestication, civilization. I have always been impressed with the awful plasticity of life and I feel that I can never lay enough stress upon the marvellous power and influence of environment.

Because *White Fang* has been reared in a savage environment, and made even more vicious by a sadistic owner named “Beauty” Smith, he becomes a ruthless killer; but removed to the gentle world of the Santa Clara Valley and treated with love, the murderous wolf becomes happily domesticated: “Human kindness was like a sun shining upon him, and he flourished like a flower planted in good soil.” The thematic crux of London’s narrative is the encounter between the domesticated wolf and the escaped convict, Jim Hall, who, because he has been treated with neither kindness nor scientific understanding, has become a mad-dog killer. In saving the life of his master’s

father, Judge Scott, from Hall, White Fang is himself critically wounded: a broken leg, several broken ribs, one of which has pierced his lungs, three bullet holes, and multiple internal injuries. "He hasn't a chance in ten thousand," remarks the surgeon who operates on him. Of course the surgeon has failed to reckon with the toughness acquired in a wilderness environment. On the other hand, even with his magnificent constitution, White Fang would have perished of such wounds without the application of modern medical techniques. Thanks to science, enhanced by human love, the hero survives as the "Blessed Wolf."

While London was at work on *White Fang*, his pastoral dream was interrupted by another grand vision: "It was all due to Captain Joshua Slocum and his *Spray*, plus our own wayward tendencies," Charmian recollected in *The Book of Jack London*. "We read him aloud to the 1905 camp children at Wake Robin Lodge, in the Valley of the Moon, as we sat in the hot sun resting between water fights and games of tag in the deep swimming pool. *Sailing Alone Around the World* was the name of the book, and when Jack closed the cover on the last chapter, there was a new idea looking out of his eyes." That idea was to build his own boat which he and Charmian could sail around the globe on a seven years' cruise. But this vision of nautical glory seemed ill-fated from the outset. Because of the San Francisco earthquake, London's fabulous dream boat, the *Snark*, was delayed more than a year in the building and sailing; and because of dishonest and incompetent contractors, who compounded the inflationary effects of the earthquake, it was shoddily built yet still cost over five times the \$7,000 originally calculated. Sail it did, however, for Honolulu on April 23, 1907; and the voyage progressed reasonably well for a year—until the Londons and their tiny crew reached Melanesia. Before the summer of 1908 ended, all of them were plagued by malaria, dysentery, and yaws; and by that fall London's health had been undermined by a half-dozen ailments, including a double fistula and a skin disease so severe that he was scarcely able to use his hands. On December 22, after spending a month in the hospital, he sadly notified his publisher, George Brett of Macmillan, and his friends that he was cancelling the voyage. "If I were a king," he later wrote in *The Cruise of the Snark*, "the worst punishment I could inflict on my enemies would be to banish them to the Solomons. On second thought, king or no king, I don't think I'd have the heart to do it." But despite its ruinous impact on his health, the *Snark* voyage did have one major salutary effect: it convinced London that the paradisaical country he sought was not halfway around the world but in his own back yard. "I also have a panacea," he affirmed in recounting his various tropical ailments. "It is California. I defy any man to get a Solomon Island sore in California."

His California ranch seemed, indeed, to be the panacea London needed after the *Snark* cruise; and for awhile after returning home he thrived as he devoted himself to fulfilling his agrarian dream. "I believe the soil is our one indestructible asset," he said. "I am rebuilding worn-out hillside lands that were worked out and destroyed by our wasteful California farmers. . . . Everything I build is for the years to come." Between 1909 and 1916 he increased the size of "Beauty Ranch" to fourteen hundred acres, one of the largest in the Sonoma Valley; and during those seven years he came to be regarded by the agricultural experts as "one of California's leading farmers" whose ranch was "one of the best in the country." By combining modern agronomy with the wisdom of Oriental agriculture (terracing, drainage, tillage, etc.), he succeeded in growing bumper crops of prunes, grapes, and alfalfa on land that had been abandoned by previous owners. He built the first concrete-block silo in California and constructed a "pig palace" which was a model of sanitation and efficiency. His livestock regularly took high honors in the county and state fairs and brought top breeding prices. One of the finest tributes he ever received was that by the famous horticulturalist Luther Burbank in his autobiographical reminiscence *The Harvest of Years*: . . . Jack London was a big healthy boy with a taste for serious things, but never cynical, never bitter, always good-humored and humorous, as I saw him, and with fingers and heart equally sensitive when he was in my gardens."

London's renewed pastoral enthusiasm manifested itself in his literary as well as in his agricultural achievements; in fact, the two fields of interest were reciprocal, each enhancing the other. Four major works—three novels and one play—reflect his agrarian vision. The first of these, *Burning Daylight*—begun in Quito, Ecuador, on June 5, 1909, during the Londons' return home from the *Snark* trip, and finished on the Ranch that fall—is the story of a Klondike bonanza king, Elam Harnish, who, having made his fortune in the Northland, seeks new worlds to conquer in the civilized Southland, only to discover that the jungle of big business is more savage than the Arctic wilderness. After being mulcted of eleven million dollars by Wall Street robber barons, he decides to fight their ruthlessness with his own. He recoups his money and consequently accumulates an even greater fortune—but in the process he loses his soul, becoming even more ruthless than those who swindled him. At the end, however, he is redeemed by the love of a woman, his secretary Dede Mason (admittedly modeled after Charmian London), who persuades him to renounce his wealth and move onto a small ranch in the Sonoma Mountains.

By this time in his career London's socialist enthusiasm had clearly begun to wane, and he envisioned a less violent solution to modern man's

woes than social revolution: "Oh, try to see!" he exclaimed to Charmian: "In the solution of the great economic problems of the present age, I see a return to the soil. I go into farming, because my philosophy and research have taught me to recognize the fact that a return to the soil is the basis of economics . . . I see my farm in terms of the world, and the world in terms of my farm." This vision is the central theme of *The Valley of the Moon*, generally considered the best of London's agrarian novels. "I am planning a serial, the motif is back to the land," he wrote to *Cosmopolitan* editor Roland Phillips on May 30, 1911:

I take a man and a woman, young, who belong to the working class in a large city. Both are wage-workers, the man is unskilled—a driver of a brewery wagon, or something of that sort. The first third of the book will be devoted to their city environment, their meeting, their love-affair, and the trials and tribulations of such a marriage in the working class. Comes hard times. The woman gets the vision. She is the guiding force. They start wandering over the country of California. Of course, they have all sorts of adventures, and their wandering becomes a magnificent, heroic detailed pilgrimage. After many hints and snatches of vision, always looking for the spot, they do find the real, one and only spot, and settle down to successful, small-scale farming.

The central characters of this novel, Saxon and Billy Roberts, lose their first child through stillbirth in the ugly, strike-ridden city of Oakland; but, like Dede and Elam Harnish, they find Eden in the Valley of the Moon. The novel concludes with a promise of new life in Saxon's announcement of her pregnancy as she and Billy, standing beside a quiet pool in the heart of their pastoral sanctuary, gaze blissfully upon a doe and a newborn fawn at the edge of the forest.

London's third agrarian novel, *The Little Lady of the Big House*, begun April 3, 1914, does not end so happily. Unlike Elam Harnish and Billy Roberts, who have purified themselves of all exploitive motives before entering the pastoral wilderness, Dick Forrest, the hero of *The Little Lady*, is possessed with a mania for efficiency and profit. The wealthy owner of a large California ranch, Forrest is a success as a commercial farmer and as a scientific breeder of prize stock—but he is a failure as a husband and father: his marriage is barren. He is London's version of the twentieth-century clockwork man whose every working hour, sleeping hour, and playing hour is governed by his watch. His wife Paula (the title character), neglected and starved for genuine affection, falls in love with Dick's best friend, the artist-writer Evan Graham, and dissolves the love-triangle by committing suicide at the end of the novel.

Contemporary reviewers condemned *The Little Lady* as a bad book that immorally portrayed the “erotomania of three persons who fiddle harmonies on the strings of sensualism.” Many of London’s critics have subsequently agreed that this is his worst novel—cynical, confused, and gratuitously if unconsciously titillating. And several of his biographers have suggested that the book was a mirror of London’s own psychological state following the multiple disasters of 1913: an attack of appendicitis and the discovery that his kidneys were badly diseased; the loss of his fruit crop by a false spring and late frost; the accidental killing of one of his prize mares by a hunter; the threatened loss of his motion picture copyrights by the lawsuit of the Balboa Amusement Company; and, on August 22, the burning of his great new mansion, the Wolf House. Although there may be some truth in these allegations, they nevertheless tend to obscure the important thematic implications underlying the tragedy of the Forrests’ marriage: While “a return to the soil” is vital, mere scientific efficiency in our treatment of the land is not the ultimate answer to the “problems of the present age”—efficiency must be tempered with love; head must be balanced by heart.

This humanistic theme is explicitly dramatized in *The Acorn-Planter*, the Bohemian Grove play which London began writing on Christmas Day, 1914, two weeks after completing the manuscript for *The Little Lady*. It is this, if any single book may be so designated, which might be fairly called Jack London’s “last will and testament to California possibilities.” The play is a mythopoeic fantasy beginning in “the morning of the world” and concluding in “the Epilogue, or Apotheosis” with “the celebration of the death of war and the triumph of the acorn-planters,” incarnated in Red Cloud, the philosopher/agrarian. California is seen throughout as the place of Edenic promise, “A sunny land, a rich and fruitful land, / The warm and golden . . . land.” Red Cloud, though killed by the Sun Men, is resurrected; and “In place of war’s alarms, peaceful days; / Above the warrior’s grave the golden grain / Turns deserts grim and stark to laughing lands.” The play ends on a strong note of affirmation as “The New Day dawns, / The day of brotherhood, / The day of man!” And in the protagonist’s final paean to life may be discerned the author’s own optimistic hopes:

The planters’ ways are the one way  
 Ever they plant for life,  
 For life more abundant,  
 For beauty of head and hand,  
 For the voices of children playing,  
 And the laughter of maids in the twilight  
 And the lover’s song in the gloom.

His agrarian optimism notwithstanding, London’s personal health was

already beginning to fail by the time he finished *The Acorn-Planter*. During the next two years, though he tried manfully to keep up a vigorous front to the public, his body betrayed him: the symptoms of uremia—edema, swollen ankles, bloated body, kidney stones, gouty rheumatism—were increasingly evident. And, while little was known about the disease at the time, there is considerable evidence that he was a victim of hypertension. Yet he refused to heed the advice of his physician that he must restrict his diet and get more rest; instead he kept up his daily—and deadly—regimen of underdone duck, heavy cigarette-smoking, five hours of sleep, with little time for real relaxation and even less for exercise. He spent several months in Hawaii in 1915 and 1916, hoping to recapture his lost health in that benevolent climate; but his body continued to deteriorate. He returned home from Hawaii in August of 1916 in time to attend the Bohemian Club High Jinks and the State Fair in Sacramento, and in early September he was hospitalized with what was diagnosed as an acute attack of rheumatism. After a week in bed he was up again, and when duck season opened the next month he began indulging himself in his favorite recipe of specially prepared nine-minute duck, working harder than ever on his plans to expand and improve his ranch. His symptoms worsened in November, and on the morning of the 22nd, he was found in bed unconscious, cyanotic, and evidently paralyzed. Despite the efforts of four attending physicians, he died that evening without ever regaining consciousness. His death certificate indicated “Uraemia following renal colic” as the immediate cause of death; more likely, the real cause was a stroke and heart attack as his symptoms suggest.

The nation mourned London’s death as the passing of a true hero—the newspapers allotting more space to Jack than to Francis Joseph I, the Emperor of Austria, who had passed away on the day before. More significantly, despite the efforts of two generations of academic critics to ignore him, London’s works have been kept alive—and in print—by the common reader, not only at home but also abroad. He remains this country’s most widely translated, most widely read author. Jack London is an important western author, to be sure; but more than this, he is a great world author.

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- A Son of the Sun*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1912. South Sea stories featuring David Grief.
- Smoke Bellew*. New York: Century, 1912. Klondike stories.
- The Night-Born*. New York: Century, 1913. Miscellaneous stories, including "war" and "The Mexican."
- The Abysmal Brute*. New York: Century, 1913. Fictional exposé of professional boxing, based on one of several plot-outlines sold to London by Sinclair Lewis.
- The Valley of the Moon*. New York: Macmillan, 1913. The second of London's Sonoma novels.
- The Strength of the Strong*. New York: Macmillan, 1914. Stories.
- The Mutiny of the Elsinore*. New York: Macmillan, 1914. Novel based in part on London's voyage around Cape Horn on the *Dirigo* in 1912.

- The Scarlet Plague*. New York: Macmillan, 1915. Novella.
- The Star Rover*. New York: Macmillan, 1915. Fantasy novel based, in part, on prison experiences of Ed Morrell.
- The Little Lady of the Big House*. New York: Macmillan, 1916. Farming novel.
- The Turtles of Tasman*. New York: Macmillan, 1916. Stories.
- Jerry of the Islands*. New York: Macmillan, 1917. Novel.
- Michael Brother of Jerry*. New York: Macmillan, 1917. Novel with Foreword indicting trained-animal shows.
- The Red One*. New York: Macmillan, 1918. Stories.
- On the Makaloa Mat*. New York: Macmillan, 1919. Hawaiian stories, including several based on Jung's theory of racial memory.
- Hearts of Three*. New York: Macmillan, 1920. Serialized cliff-hanger written in tandem with scenarist Charles Goddard.
- Dutch Courage and Other Stories*. New York: Macmillan, 1922. Early juvenile stories, including London's first prize-winning sketch, "Story of a Typhoon off the Coast of Japan."
- The Assassination Bureau, Ltd.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963. Mystery thriller based on plot-outline sold to London by Sinclair Lewis and completed by Robert L. Fish.

2. Drama (in chronological order)

- Scorn of Women*. New York: Macmillan, 1906. Three-act play based on "The Scorn of Women," in *The God of His Fathers*.
- Theft: A Play in Four Acts*. New York: Macmillan, 1910. Written for Olga Nethersole but never produced in the United States.
- The Acorn-Planter: A California Forest Play*. New York: Macmillan, 1916. Written as a Grove Play for the Bohemian Club's Jinks but never staged because of difficulties in setting it to music.
- The First Poet*. In *The Turtles of Tasman*. New York: Macmillan, 1916. One-act play written by George Sterling, who asked London to publish it under his own name; first published in *Century Magazine*, June, 1911; produced at the Forest Theatre, Carmel, California, July 20, 1915.
- A Wicked Woman*. In *The Human Drift*. New York: Macmillan, 1917. One-act play based on story by the same title, in *When God Laughs*; produced on the Orpheum Theater Circuit in 1910.
- The Birth Murk*. In *The Human Drift*. One-act vaudeville skit written for ex-heavyweight boxing champion Robert Fitzsimmons and his wife Julia; first produced as "Her Brother's Clothes" in San Francisco in 1910.
- Daughters of the Rich*. James E. Sisson, ed. Oakland: Holmes Book Co., 1971. Curtain raiser, evidently written by Hilda Gilbert, who persuaded London to put his name to it as a favor.
- Gold*. James E. Sisson, ed. Oakland: Holmes Book Co., 1972. Three-act play written by Herbert Heron, based on two of London's stories: "A Day's Lodging," in *Love of Life*, and "The Man on the Other Bank," in *Smoke Bellew*.

3. Non-fiction (in chronological order)

*The Kempton-Wace Letters*. New York: Macmillan, 1903. Epistolary dialogue on love, written in collaboration with Anna Strunsky.

*The People of the Abyss*. New York: Macmillan, 1903. Sociological study of living conditions in the East End of London.

*War of the Classes*. New York: Macmillan, 1905. Essays.

*The Road*. New York: Macmillan, 1907. Tramping reminiscences.

*Revolution and Other Essays*. New York: Macmillan, 1910.

*The Cruise of the Snark*. New York: Macmillan, 1911. Travel sketches.

*John Barleycorn*. New York: Century, 1913. Autobiographical treatise on alcohol.

*The Human Drift*. New York: Macmillan, 1917. Miscellany.

*Letters from Jack London*. Edited by King Hendricks and Irving Shepard. New York: Odyssey, 1965.

*Jack London Reports: War Correspondence, Sports Articles, and Miscellaneous Writings*. Edited by King Hendricks and Irving Shepard. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970.

*No Mentor but Myself: A Collection of Articles, Essays, Reviews and Letters, by Jack London, on Writing and Writers*. Edited by Dale L. Walker. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1979.

*Jack London on the Road: The Tramp Diary and Other Hobo Writings*. Edited by Richard W. Etulain. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1979.

4. Unpublished Sources

The major repository for London's papers is the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California, where some sixty thousand items (notes, manuscripts, letters, scrapbooks, along with many books from London's personal library) are housed. The next largest collection is at the Merrill Library, Utah State University, Logan; in addition to London's own notes and letters, this collection comprises much of Charmian London's correspondence. Other smaller but significant collections are housed at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; the Jack London Museum and the Jack London State Park, both in Glen Ellen, California; the Oakland Public Library; the Stanford University Library; the University of Southern California (the Cresmer Collection); the University of California at Los Angeles (the Irving Stone Collection); the Stuart Library of Western Americana at the University of the Pacific (presentation copies of London's first editions to his first wife Bessie and to his two daughters Joan and Becky); and the University of Virginia (the Clifton Waller Barrett Collection, comprising more than one hundred London letters).

**Critical and Biographical Studies**

Foner, Philip S., ed. *Jack London, American Rebel: A Collection of his Social Writings together with an Extensive Study of the Man and His Times*. New York: Citadel, 1947. Socialistic.

- Geismar, Maxwell. "Jack London: The Short Cut." In *Rebels and Ancestors: The American Novel, 1890-1915*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953. Psychoanalytic.
- Hendricks, King, ed. *Creator and Critic: A Controversy between Jack London and Philo M. Buck, Jr.* Logan: Utah State University Press, 1961. An exchange of letters between Buck and London concerning an article published by Buck which criticized London's *Martin Eden* and *Burning Daylight*.
- , ed. *Jack London: Master Craftsman of the Short Story*. Logan: The Faculty Association, Utah State University, 1966. Indicates three major characteristics of London's artistry: ability to weave a narrative, to create atmosphere, and to use irony effectively; discusses "To Build a Fire," "Love of Life," "The Law of Life," and "The Chinago."
- Kingman, Russ. *A Pictorial Life of Jack London*. New York: Crown, 1979. A sympathetic but well-researched, reliable biography.
- Labor, Earle. *Jack London*. New York: Twayne, 1974. First book-length critical study of London's work.
- London, Charmian K. *The Book of Jack London*. 2 vols. New York: Century, 1921. Biased and poorly organized, but nonetheless valuable as a source of information about London's life and personality.
- London, Joan. *Jack London and His Times: An Unconventional Biography*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1939; rpt. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968, with a new introduction by the author. Remarkably objective study by London's daughter; complements the biography by his widow Charmian.
- Lynn, Kenneth S. "Jack London: The Brain Merchant." In *The Dream of Success: A Study of the Modern American Imagination*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1955. Traces the effect of the "success myth" on London's consciousness.
- McClintock, James I. *White Logic: Jack London's Short Stories*. Grand Rapids: Wolf House Books, 1975. First full-length treatment of the short fiction.
- Ownbey, Ray Wilson, ed. *Jack London: Essays in Criticism*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Peregrine Smith, 1978. Contains some of the best essays written on London in the past twenty-five years.
- Rather, Lois. *Jack London, 1905*. Oakland: The Rather Press, 1974. Detailed study of this crucial year of London's life.
- Sinclair, Andrew. *Jack: A Biography of Jack London*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. Though distorted by overemphasis of London's physical ailments, useful in dispelling the myths of his "supermanhood."
- Starr, Kevin. "The Sonoma Finale of Jack London, Rancher." In *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. Strained effort to interpret London's career as a nightmarish dramatization of "a modality of California madness."
- Stone, Irving. *Sailor on Horseback: The Biography of Jack London*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938. Rpt. as *Jack London, Sailor on Horseback: A Biographical Novel*, New York: Doubleday, 1947; and as *Jack London: His Life, Sailor on Horseback (A Biography) and Twenty-Eight Selected Jack London Stories*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977. Unreliable popular biography containing many passages plagiarized from London's own fictional and semi-autobiographical works.

- Walcutt, Charles Child. *Jack London*. University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966. Evaluates London as a possessor of powerful talent who “can evoke sharp images, explain complex procedures and describe intricate mechanisms and processes with economy and clarity.”
- Walker, Dale L. *The Alien Worlds of Jack London*. Grand Rapids: Wolf House Books, 1973. Pioneering treatment of London’s “fantasy fiction.”
- Walker, Franklin. *Jack London and the Klondike*. San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1966. Articulate, scholarly treatment of London’s Northland experiences and their influence on his literary career.
- . *The Seacoast of Bohemia: An Account of Early Carmel*. San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1966; enlarged ed., Santa Barbara, California: Peregrine Smith, 1973. Informative study of London’s relationship with poet George Sterling and other members of the Carmel group such as Mary Austin and Jimmy Hopper.
- Watson, Charles N., Jr. *The Novels of Jack London: A Reappraisal*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. The first extensive critical treatment of London’s longer fiction; complements McClintock’s *White Logic*.

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