CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

LITERARY SCENE AND CONTEMPORARY WRITING

The period Jack London lived and wrote in was a transition age. It was the end of nineteenth century, which had found the nation in a state of great social and political unrest. Throughout this turbulent period there was a curious dichotomy between literature and life. Anyone dependent upon American letters to guide him would have obtained the most confused and inaccurate conceptions of the life led by the Americans and the problems confronting them. The Americans of this time were mainly concerned with romantic love sometimes enacted in remote times. It was a period of ferment, of change from frontier to 'civilization' both in physical fact and in national thought. It was a period torn by contradictory and ambiguous views of man and his society; a time in which traditional philosophies clashed with new concept, and was deeply imbued with a certain magmatic and complex ideology, typical of the Progressive Era.

It was an age wherein the cultural life of the Americans were largely dominated by a complex of inherited
values - now ironically called the Genteel Traditions. This 'tradition', eventually lost its cultural dominance in Jack London's life time. The reasons for its decline were complex, but among them was the emergence of new values, concepts and forces in art and thought with which the 'tradition' was unprepared to cope. Certain outstanding elements of the new generation were responsible for the break from the Genteel Tradition.

At least in the cities, there was an acceptance among the Americans of the 'fin-de-siecle' spirit which had some pretension to cosmopolitanism ('sophistication'). To elaborate it further, Frederick Jackson Turner, stated at the annual convention of the American Historical Society "American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. The perennial rebirth, the fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.... And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone and with its going has closed the first period of American history". The frontier had vanished and along with it - the Edenic dream. Turner writes, "since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity and the people of the
United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them,... But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves". This nostalgia for the past has been echoed by the late nineteenth century intellectual historian, Henry Adames, who observed that "during this last decade everyone talked and seemed to feel fin-de-siecle". By the 'fin-de-siecle' spirit one means, briefly the emotional attitudes consequent on the pessimistic belief that civilization was inevitably declining. 

Sensitive souls with aesthetic bend and with sentiment of rebellion felt the greater need of traditional expression and could find existence bearable only by throwing themselves into a life of sensation and of art. At the end of the nineteenth century, the counter movements in an increasingly commercial and materialistic culture still tended to the formation of quasi-religious cults and sects. There was the cult of Bohemianism and the accessory cults of the far away or long ago, the esoteric, the theosophic and the occult-cabalistic, all features of the '90's in particular. The philosophic attitude of pessimism got a boost and was encouraged by the discovery of Schopenhaur, Von Hertman, Wagner and Nietzsche, etc., to name a few. Then there was the cult of aestheticism—"art for art's sake", being art specifically not for the competition of the popular market. The prestige of the decadent and art for art's sake movements in London, coupled with
desultory information about an analogous development in French, German and Italian poetry, became a source of inspiration helping to maintain and sustain an American aesthetic revolt. There was, in another direction, the cult of 'vagabandia,' popularized in the poes of Richard Harvey and the Canadian Bliss Carmel; and even the heartier cult of the 'strenuous life' endorsed between 1901 and 1909 by the White House itself. At the same time, there was a strong motivation among the Americans, which was affected by the time, to have a new frontier. United States was still recovering from the "Panic of 1893" and the effect of Civil War. The farmers agitation, swelling of American cities, squeezing of small businessman by the giant monopolies; the political corruption, the moral hypocrises and social affectation of the genteel tradition — in short, revulsion against all the decadence of the Guilded Age galvanized the nation's yearning to recapture it lost youth.

While such was the mode of the Age, suddenly and unexpectedly the vast mysterious Northland open up one final splendid opportunity for a return to the paradisical wilderness for Edenic rebirth, riches and manhood. "I believed that I was about to see and take part in a most picturesque and impressive movement across the wilderness," reminisced Hamlin Garland. "I belived it to be the last march of the kind which could ever come to America, so rapidly where 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 free to
face with the great free spaces of woods, skies and
streams."

The educated Americans started to accept the
 evolutionary theory, an acceptance that despite the
emergence of the 'Social Gospel' as a practical via media
between Darwinism and Christianity. This resulted in
deepening the crisis of the idealist position and brought
in a rift in the discussion of evolution among the
American scientists and theologians. The controversy was
aggravated with the publication of Herbert
Spencer's, *Synthetic Philosophy*. Spencer's sweeping
generalization appealed to the American love of broad
statement; his distrust of state action pleased industrial
leaders; and his vague generalizations that progress was
virtually assured to man by evolution pleased reformers and
labour leaders committed as they were to a principle of
voluntarism. The evolutionary hypothesis affected all
departments of the American culture. Those who struggled
with the problem of the relation of the evolutionairy
hypothesis to the social present and the probable future of
American life can be divided into two broad categories: one
group interpreted evolution, imaginatively or
philosophically, as supporting a doctrine of loyalty to
idealism. Social progress and religious "modernism", usually
taking shape as the "social Gospel"; another more
disillusioned group tended to the point of view that progress was an illusion, a state of action for ameliorative purposes, a piece of sentimentality, altruism a timepiece of ruthless competition in the struggle for existence.

The other element of the milieu was the enthusiastic proclamation of realistic and naturalistic theories of art, especially by the rising generation of the novelists. W.D. Howells (1837-1920) was the chief exponent of a theory of realism and cultural exponent during the period of a mild but sincere form of gradualistic socialism. Howells exemplified a quality of fictional realism devoted to the sympathetic presentation of average middle-class American life. The richness of late nineteenth-century American writing in the description and analysis of essential society is a leading symptom of the ascendancy of realism. Here, too, more often than not, practical criticism and evangelical prophecy went hand in hand. The new culture of cities, and of cyclical capitalism, was the main focus of attention in such writings. The Times of London remarked in the '90's, that the amount of literary labour which is now being expanded in America upon economical and industrial problems is something prodigious.

Apart from the above elements there was a social awakening after "the Panic of 1893", especially among the workers a realization dawned that their personal
predicaments were not unique but the results of conditions affecting their entire class. The country had suffered greatly and in the nineties the world of book knowledge and higher education was essentially the world of the middle class. The American experiment seemed to be heading towards disaster, industrial democracy looked impossible, and the American society appeared to be "sick." The middle class which was to emerge as the voice in the near future were unaware of the nature of the sociological puzzle confronting the country. During this period there appeared consequently an important library of books designed to describe sympathetically a variety of American "underdogs" and to indicate ways of improving the conditions of both the misfits and of the American commonwealth. Certain books, based on field trips and frontline observation came forth, and the notorious "tramp" problem was discovered, which was one of the most publicized social symptoms of the time and the most frightening to the middle class imagination; as well as the problems of the Negroes and of the immigrants were posed. Many writers but to name a few, like, Jane Adams (1869 - 1935), Mary Atin (1881 - 1949), G.W. Gable (1884-1925), Josiah Flynt (1869-1907), Jacob A Riss (1849-1914) of walter A. Wyckoff (1865-1908) brought forth to the reading public all the happenings of that age, which deeply impressed them in bringing the vast changes in the society.

Another feature of this era was the disturbing
discovery of large classes of Americans and of persons resident in America of not enjoying the fruits of an ideal democratic society. This led the people to consider ways and means to achieve practical reforms within the existing political movement. The climax of this movement was the Progressive Movement, which reached its height in the election of 1912. The characteristic literary expression corresponding to the political movement was the literature of muckraking. Much of the muckraking library was ephemeral, although some of it has lasting value. The most sagacious volume rising out of the progressivism of the early twentieth century and a key book for the interpretation of American life before World War I is Herbert D. Croly (1869-1930), *The Promise of American Life*, 1909. Other general books of more than ephemeral value include, Herbert Demarest Lloyd (1847-1903) *Wealth Against Commonwealth* 1894, Lincoln Steffens (1866-1936). *The Shame of the Cities* 1904. The auto-biographical writings was another phase of the progressive era and are at once documents of primary importance for understanding the doctrine of change within the American system and valuable revelations of character and personality. Among them are Tom L. Johnson (1854-1911) *My Story* 1911, Robert M. La Follette (1855-1925) *Autobiography* 1913.
BIograPHICAL SKETCH

In 1913, Jack London was the the highest-paid, best known and most popular writer in the world. Now, over one hundreded years after his birth, many of his novel and short stories are still in print, European critics are calling him the finest American popular novelist — finer than Mark Twain — and in Russia he is considered the best of all foreign writers.

Jack London was born in San Francisco, California on January 12, 1876 and came of age during that decade called "the watershed of American history" and dying on November 22, 1916. The historian, Dixon Wecter tells us, "No great American idol has lacked a touch lent by the struggle against odds, or by discouragement and passing failure." This is an apt comment about a man known to the world as Jack London who become a national legend in his own life time. Jack London personified the most crucial transition in American cultural history. His generation was the last to embody truly that "coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness [that] restless, nervous energy [that] dominant individualism [and] buoyancy and exuberance which Frederick Jackson Turner defined as the American character shaped by the frontier experience. John Griffith London (he prefered Jack - or better "wolf") was a
child of that experience. Honest, vital, optimistic, he became a man of the twentieth century: complex, sensitive, frustrated - at moments self-destructive and aware of the darkness within the human heart. "Wolf" tells us a lot in respect of Jack London and it maybe noted that, "Wolves", as Jane E Brody has written in recent times about the once feared creatures, "are highly sociable animals with a strong respect for family, status, and territory, and have a rich language that sustains the group and, fosters individual survival." No other writer has more dramatically epitomized in his own rise to success the rich contrarities of the American Dream than Jack London. The fact of London's self-made legend puts to prosaic shame the fiction of Horatio Alger, Jr. life of Garfield, From Canal Box to President, and this instilled in him a work-ethic as a means to real escape from poverty. He tells us in "How I became a Socialist," as "faithful a wage slave as ever a capitalist exploited" and in his young manhood, still convinced that by sheer struggle "and honest hard work" he could escape his poverty. Jack London's Life-style was a symbolic epitome of the greater myth, and he was no more paradoxical than the American character. In, The American Adam, R.W.B. Lewis has defined this mythic figure as "a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race: an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him.
with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources." The definition if altered a little would have suited Jack London who was born in the poorer district of San Francisco. London's birth is shrouded in mystery and touched by scandal. Born out of a wedlock, Jack London’s supposed father was a footloose, flamboyant astrologer, William Henry Chaney, with whom Flora Wellman, his mother, lived in 1875; although Chaney denied this fatherhood in a letter to twenty-one-year old Jack. Flora Wellman married John London, a widower with two daughters, who treated young Jack as his own from that time onward. John London was a good man but a poor provider and Jack's early years were spent under the threat of hardship and poverty. At an early age Jack was forced by necessity to become a self-propelling individualist confronting circumstances and destiny "with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources." Jack's reminiscences about his childhood is tinged with bitterness and shame. He summarizes his deprivation he felt as a child, in a letter to his first serious love, Mabel Applegarth:

... I have fought and am fighting my battle alone... Do you know my childhood? When I was seven years old, at the country school of San Pedro, this happened. Meat, I was that hungry for it I once opened a girl's basket and stole a piece of meat - a little piece the size of my two fingers... In those days, like Esan, I would have literally sold my birthright for a mess of pottage, a piece of meat...

This meat incident is a epitome of my whole life. I was eight years old when I put on my first undershirt made at or bought at a store. Duty-at ten years I was on the streets selling newspapers. Every cent was turned over to my people, and I went to school in
constant shame of hats, shoes, clothes I wore. Duty—from then on I had no childhood. Up at three o’clock in the morning to carry papers. When that was finished I did not go home but continued on to school—school out, my evening papers. Saturday I worked on an ice wagon. Sunday I went to a bowling alley and set up pins for drunken Dutchmen. Duty—I turned every cent and went dressed like a scarecrow. *14*

Jack London’s short story "The Law of Life" was published in 1902 and this brought him to the front of American literature. He held, a contradictory but central position, from then on unto his death, as one of the most sensitive recorders and spokesmen of the tensions, ambiguities and illusion of the American society. A society which on its part—and exactly in that period—comes to the world forefront in such a domineering way.

Henry James might almost have had him in mind when he remarked: "Be one of these on whom nothing is lost.... live all you can; it’s a mistake not to." Jack, the tireless rover who never outgrew his need to engage and record life in all its phase, was a true disciple not only of Teddy Roosevelt’s "strenuous life", but of the Jamesian philosophy of timely—gathered experience. He lived "all he could." and by so doing, enriched the lives of readers every where who discovered new worlds of vicarious participation and emotional consolation in his stories.

Jack London’s early life witnessed that decade which, went through the deepest crises of the expanding American capitalism and which threw him in the vortex of a harsh and
conflicting reality.

I had been poor. Poor I had lived. I had gone hungry on occasion. I had never had toys nor playthings like other children. My first memories of life were pinched by poverty. The pinch of poverty had become chronic. . . . *16*

Later on in a letter to his first publisher, he asserted, "...from my ninth year, with the exception of the hours spent at school (and I earned them by hard labour), my life had been one of toil." But Lest it seems that he was nothing more than a drudge -- 'a work beast,' as he called himself; he vividly describes his traumatic experience of Hick Mott's cannery as a work-beast in his story, "The Apostate," which is auto-biographical in nature. Jack writes about 'Jonny,' the boy in the story, "there was no joyousness in life for him. The procession of the days he never saw. The nights he slept away in twitching unconsciousness....He had no mental life whatever; yet deep down in the crypts of his mind, unknown to him were weighed and shifted every hour of his toil, every movement of his hands, every twitch of his muscles, and preparation were making for a future coarse of action that would amaze him and all his little world." *17*

But Jack found means of escape and throughout his life, he was trying to escape from loneliness, drudgery and boredom. As a child he found refuge in the fantasy world of
the books and become quite well read. This urge to read reinforced his already strong developed drive to succeed. His next jaunt of escapes were through wandering and from the drudgery of the work, he found some escape in the back waters of San Francisco Bay in a battered old skiff which is recalled in his novel, *The Valley of the Moon*, where he appears as a boy in a skiff with a heroine, Soxaon Roberts:

"What do you want?" she asked, partly from idleness, and yet with genuine curiosity; for she felt drawn to this boy in knee pants who was so confident and at the same time so wistful.

"What do I want?" he repeated after her. Turning his head slowly, he followed the sky line, pausing especially when his eyes rested landward on the brown Contra-Costa Hills, and seaward, past Alcatraz, on the Golden Gate. The wistfulness in his eyes was overwhelming and went to her heart.

"That," he said, sweeping the circle of the world with a wave of his arm. 18

He next bought a sloop, Razzle Dazzle, with the borrowed money of his former wet-nurse, Jennie Prentiss and, along with it got a 'consort' an amorous sixteen-year, old Mamie. He then turned into an Oyster Pirate and came to be know as Prince of the Oyster Pirates. After he grew tired of piracy, he joined forces with the law and spent about a year as a fish patrolman. Dissatisfaction grew with the passage of time and he missed committing suicide in a drunken state in the Bay. The water-front proved to be a dead end and the far off music of his youthful dream beckoned him to the sea.
He shipped out on a sealing schooner, Sophia Sutherland, bound for Japan and the Bearing Sea, as an able seaman for about a seven month voyage, which yielded rich experience for his writing career. Jack returned from the sea in the late summer of '1893' and due to utter poverty was again initiated into the dreaded world of work-beast. There he learnt a bitter lesson of his life while being under the impression that he was learning trade. The bitterness of his realization of being an unskilled labourer made him escape this life to join rather loosely Coxey's Army of the unemployed. It was during this march of Coxey's unemployed workers towards Washington that he was initiated into the Road. When he found the march unpleasant, he eventually deserted it and drifted around the country as a hobo which is narrated in the unforgettable pages of The Road, 'the world of the homeless, of the freight-trains, of the nights under the stars, of the rides on the rods and on the decks'. During this time he served a prison term of thirty days for vagrancy in Eric County penitentiary which made him realize his status in society. This experience of the Road made him more determined not to use his impermanent, underpaid muscles but rather his brain. Jack emerged from his "life in the underworld" with more than a formula for self-elevation. It was during this experience that he heard about the writings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels; it was his "rebirth into socialism". After his return from the Road, his foremost priority was education and he tried to cram his
studies, only to leave it in disgust, due to various reasons.

Jack's final escape from the Social Pit was the joining of the Yukon Gold Rush and this proved to be the most profitable experience. Even though he mined no gold in Klondike, he learned enough from listening to the stories of those who did the mining and from his own observation of life about him, to earn a fortune in later years. While apparently wasting a winter, he was in fact:

weaving a legend, creating a Klondike that never existed except in his imagination, a myth so powerful it was accepted as reality by people who had actually lived it. He was making a fairly ordinary breed of men... into a race of heroes, great of heart, mind and body. Without knowing it, he was passing through the most fruitful winter of his life in the camp on Upper Island."19"

He wrote in one of his pamphlet 'Jack London By Himself' that "it was in the Klondike that I found myself. There you get your perspective, I got mine." There he read Darwin, Spenser, Haeckel and Milton. His reading till now resulted in the confusion of his theories, because he always did things in hurry as if time was flying away from him. He returned to Oakland and took to writing which again was turning to be fruitless. While he was thinking to return to manual work, he took the post office examination and passed but he gambled in not joining this job. In the meantime, awaiting his appointment he again turned to writing. It was a heart -- breaking effort but within a
year, that is by 1899, he sold his first story and in five years time he had published as many books drawn from his Northland adventure.

1903 saw the publication of *The Call of the Wild*, making him famous all over the world as a writer, and subsequently he became the first writer to earn a million dollars from his pen. Jack's life, before he established himself as a writer, always began with periods of tremendous exertion, supported by that enormous and awesome vitality which marks his works and then an escape from that phase in search for adventurous freedom. The terms, 'escape' and 'escapist' are used by Joan London and other critics. This seemingly irresponsibility may also be considered an essential phase in Jack's progress, a necessary boldness rather than the cowardice escapism implies. Joan London may have used this term unconsciously as she may have felt abandoned during her childhood and especially when she needed him most during her growing period. This betrayal of her father, Jack London, may have sunk deep in the recess of her mind which has unconsciously sprang forth in her writings. If Jack had not been different and had not the will and courage to simply leave the jute mill or the cannery or the laundry, little of this or his stories would have been written. Then the greatest wonders in Jack's chaotic existence, which proves the term, 'escape/escapist' wrong, is the steady, disciplined daily stint of writing.
one thousand words a day, every day -- and earlier, while trying to sell his first story, that titanic fifteen-hour-a-day struggle for a long year to "beat the capitalist" in his own system. Whatever the later effects of the philosophers, it is first personal experience and his own era that shaped Jack's philosophy, and that made the theme of struggle central to his best work.

How well he worked the success formula is evident when we realize that London was neither a great thinker, nor a great literary artist, nor in the usual sense - a great man. The key to his legend, which is likewise the key to the American dream was sheer vitality. From 1900 to 1916, he toured the country, giving lectures and writing freely for the Socialist Party. Kenneth S. Lynn has pointed out that Jack's socialism "clearly reflects the success aspiration of an ex-newsboy... and reveals the impingement of the life outlook of Horatio Alger on that of Karl Marx". He also gathered material in the London slums for an important sociological treatise, The People of the Abyss, and in after years Jack often said," of all my books. I love most The People of the Abyss. No other book of mine took so much of my young heart and tears as that study of the economic degradation of the poor.

Jack supported two wives and several families but all those whom he helped turned out to be ungrateful people and this realization left a deep mark on his sensitive psyche.
He worked as a war correspondent in Korea and Mexico and from it came his confirmation of racial theories. He built his own ship, "The Snark", and sailed halfway around the globe. Throughout his life Jack changed his profession and the last one was his development of the most beautiful country estates in the world, part of which is now Jack London State Park. Here he pioneered in modern agriculture and livestock breeding and at the same time, he somehow managed to answer countless letters from friends, aspiring writers, down-and-outs, and curiosity mongers. He alongwith all these activities produced half a hundred books.

If vitality was the key to the London legend, it was also the key to the London tragedy: his prodigal energy was ultimately his undoing. The supreme irony of his life was that, after breaking out from the underworld of the work-best, London succeeded in working himself to death. Jack's physique already showed the sign of a too strenuous life, too much hard playing, hard drinking and hard living, yet he refused to take care of himself, which might be due to his disillusionment with life, despite insistent warnings of his doctors and pleadings of his wife and friends. It is apparent from his fiction as well as his life that he could never conceive of existence that did not involve struggle. His attempt to find repose, to end the struggle, only indicates that he was tired of life too. His deepest
conviction said that life was struggle and it was this view that shapes his best literature and gives it tension and vitality. As his desire to struggle began to weaken, so did his fiction, it can be inferred that it was due to the loss of inspiration and ability that he failed to write valid literature.

Jack was dead before he reached the age of forty-one but in this short span of sixteen years of writing career, he produced a voluminous account of his writing ability. The circumstances leading to his death, like those of his birth, are shrouded in mystery and this has intensified the legend befitting any legendary hero. His biographers have showed that Jack committed suicide with an overdose of drugs; but at the same time those nearest to him support a less sensational verdict and they have given their argument persuasively that Jack’s death was due to a miscalculation about medication. One of them has also written that the problem with Jack was the trend prevailing in those days for Americans to treat themselves at home and adding further that Jack was the victim of an age before antibiotics; like Byron at Missolonghi, he was slowly killed by the mistakes of the doctors as well as by his own mistakes too. This theory has been well elaborated by Alfred S. Shivers, "Jack London: Not a Suicide". Irrespective of the reasons supporting his death, Jack lived a dozen normal life and he was simply worn out. Aside from the mysteries, the Jack London legend still survives in his books. The lines of a verse which
Jack prefixed to Martin Eden are prophetic of his own end and a summary of much of his fiction:

Let me live out my years in the heat of blood!
Let me lie drunken with the dreamer's wine!
Let me not see this soul-house built of mud!
Go toppling to the dust a vacant shrine!

LITERARY EMERGENCE-APPRENTICESHIP AND RECOGNITION:

1998-1902

Jack returned to Oakland after a trip of sixteen months from Klondike in the summer of 1898, with a firm determination to become a successful writer and thus once for all escape from the 'social pit'. His endeavor in his apprenticeship to master the art of good writing didn't disappoint him for a long time but the task always proved to be heart-breaking. The heart-breaking disappointments always goaded him to remain faithful to be 'a vendor of brain' rather than to turn into a seller of 'muscles'. Later on he wrote in one of his letters to Mable Applegarth, about his decision to stick to the uncertainty of a writing career than to accept the security of an unskilled job:

If I had followed [the call of duty, which said "get a job"] what would I have been to-day? I would be a laborer and by that I mean I would be fitted for nothing else than labor... If I had followed that,
would I have known you? If I had followed that, who
would I have known whose companionship I would
esteem? If I had followed that from childhood, whose
companionship would I now be fitted to enjoy? -
Tennyson's? or a bunch of brute hoodlums on a street
corner? 25

No matter Jack's apprenticeship years proved to be a
Herculean task, he held on to it with a dying swimmer's
will. He kept writing and continued to study the art of
short story; as the period to make a living through writing
was proving to be the world of magazines and periodicals. He
studied the magazines to learn what subject matter and what
technique and forms would be suitable for his purposes. He
imitated the art of Kipling's writing method because Kipling
was at that time the most acclaimed short story writer. His
period of apprenticeship saw the publication of collections
of Alaskan stories which varied in its quest for an adequate
form.

Jack was bewitched with the idea of becoming a
successful writer. He wrote constantly and hurried them off
to editors who in their turn showered him with hundreds of
rejection slips, making them unwanted stories, and proving
wrong in their decisions. Even then Jack kept himself busy
with his mental toil which was proving to be more demanding
of his resources than even shoveling coal. Time just flew by
and Jack bent himself to his work of mastering the art of
writing and Jack describes the writing of this period:

Heavens how I wrote! Never was there a creative
fever such as mine from which the patient escaped fatal
results. The way I worked was enough to soften my brain and send me to a mad house. I wrote, I wrote everything—ponderous essays, scientific and sociological, short stories, humorous verse, verse of all sorts from trios and sonnets to blank verse tragedy and elephantine epics in Spenserian stanzas. On occasions I composed steadily, day after day, for fifteen hours a day. At times I forgot to eat, or refused to tear myself away from my passionate outpouring in order to eat.*26*

Jack did manage to publish a story or two before his departure to Klondike but it was the experience he gained there, that helped him in making a name for himself as a writer. It was not only the experience but determination and hard work. The best account of this period is mentioned in Martin Eden wherein it shows the story of a questioning mind, eager to understand, eager to be creative and so dramatic that its spirit almost inevitably captures the loyalties of young readers.

Jack had no contention about his writing for money, he wrote to his friend Jones; "If cash comes with fame, come fame, if cash comes without fame, come cash." This does not prove that Jack wrote for money but what money would buy: "I shall always hate the task of getting money, every time I sit down to write it is with great disgust. I'd sooner be out in the open wandering around most any old place. So the habit of money—getting will never become one of my vices. But the habit of money spending, ah God! I shall always be its victim." Even after his confession, "more money means more life to me", he wrote some great
pieces of writing and if it had not been the ages' harshness and belly need, he would have written great masterpieces. There has been very few great writers who failed to acknowledge in their heart that they were not writing for money; which makes one recall Dr. Johnson's quip that "No man but a blockhead ever wrote for money". Earle Labor has rightly defended that even though Jack wrote for money, he produced great writings losing interest in his writing career only in the later part of his life. Jack, in his memories of his tramping experiences, describes this process as a kind of apprenticeship for his writing:

The successful hobo must be an artist. He must create spontaneously and instantaneously - and not upon a theme selected from the plentitude of his own imagination, but upon the theme he reads in the face of the person who opens the door, be it man, women, or child, sweet or crabbed, generous or miserly, good-natured or cantankerous, Jew or Gentile, Black or White, race-prejudiced or brotherly, provincial or universal, or whatever else it may be. I have often thought that ten training of my tramp days is due much of my success as a story-writer. *29*

His apprenticeship ended with the publication in the summer of 1903 of The Call of the Wild and its appearance marked both the climax and the end of a phase in Jack's writing career.

Jack's literary achievement was closely related to his life. Three biographical factors mainly accounts for his success as a writer:

a) the poverty that instilled a driving ambition to rise in the world:
b) the wanderlust that provided the rich matrix of human experience from which his fiction is drawn:

c) the omnivorous appetite for reading that gave him philosophical substance and a sense of artistic form.

The experience of early life had furnished Jack with a wealth of those materials from which great literature are woven; upon this raw stuff of life was imposed the synthesizing force of keen sensibility and a hard earned craftsmanship. Warner Berthoff, admits that to some extent Jack's popularity was also due to the "darker, more complex intuitions" in his fiction and adds further:

He had a shrewd instinct for the chronic main currents of middle-class hallucination, especially a kind of retributive daydreaming about acts of pure domination or unconditional conquest. He appealed most strongly to readers who wanted their daydreams explained a little, dignified by an overglaze of objective theory.31

Jack's emergence as a popular writer in his own life time was due to the creation of the image of the heroic macho writer wherein he lived his fiction and made a fiction of his living. His lifestyle and behavioural pattern was no less than the Great American Novelist. At the same time the reading public's appetite had been whetted by the stories of Rudyard Kipling and social Darwinism which demanded something more raw and natural than the niceties of the Mauve Decade.

It can also be inferred that Jack's writing had the
quality of popular literature, whose main function was escape from the pain of social reality. We can further say that during peacetime 'raw' and 'natural' novels are needed to stimulate in the overfed and lazy populace the illusion of martial adventure. This logic can stand in explaining the popularity of the naturalistic novel of blood and struggle which is a dominant theme of Jack's Alaskan writing, and readers respond to this quality of Jack's writing without fully understanding why. Even though it is dangerous to access the popularity trait of a writer, we can say that Jack's stories have the compelling quality of truly exciting fiction blended with romanticism.

Jack's recognition as a writer was his timely arrival during that period when American literature was no more able to stand the pressure of modern life and was eagerly looking forward for a new leap. Before his arrival it had remained narrow and had failed to depict the happenings that were sweeping the country. It had tried to remain impartial to all the changes taking place but by the nineties the pioneers of the new literature forged ahead. At the same time outworn traditions of gentility swiftly crumbled before the vigorous portrayal of modern American life with the conservatives being forced to bow down before this onslaught of new literature which was being avidly read by countless thousands of Americans. Thus in a short duration America witnessed the phenomenal sales of books and periodicals.
Another contributing factor was the increasing world of magazines which were made available to the general masses at an affordable prices, due to technological improvement in printing and manufacturing of papers. Jack's London's popularity has been emphasised by various critics and his everlasting appeal can explained with the help of the prose poem which appeared for the first time in Russian:

Of man of the future! who is able to describe him? Perhaps he breaks our globe into fragments,
In a time of warlike games.
Perhaps he hurls death through the firmament.
Man of the future! He is able to aim at the stars.
To harness the comets,
And to travel in space among the planets


3. Labor, p. 36.

4. Jones and Ludwig, p. 89.

5. Ibid p. 90.

6. Ibid p. 91.


16. Philip S. Foner ed. *Jack London, American Rebel* (Seven
21. Labor, p.IX.
28. Ibid. p.96-97.