CHAPTER III

WRITING OF LONDON

NON-FICTION: THE DOWNTRODDEN, CLASS-STRUGGLE, AND REVOLUTION

Jack London always sympathised with those who belonged to the submerged tenth. It was his experience, mainly bitter, which made him realize that to rise out of the "social pit" and raise other less fortunate than himself: he had to fight for them. Out of these experience came his great essays and speeches always in favour of the class which had no back-bone of its own. Jack had known at a very early age, that irrespective of the numbers, the submerged tenth stood no chance against the tentacles of the rich class.

Jack remembers the time he was forced, out of sheer necessity, to spend on the road. He writes: "... I was down in the cellar... me a terrible scare...." The experience of the road is vividly portrayed in his writing. The Road, which left an everlasting mark on his psychic. Throughout his active writing career, essays depicting the evils of the capitalist society and its terrible effect on the downtrodden sprang forth from his pen. Irrespective of the consequences of such writings and speeches, he kept on with...
this act because at heart he knew what it meant to be poor. Jack once wrote, "I had been poor. Poor I had lived... My first memories of life were pinched by poverty. The pinch of poverty had become chronic..." This chronic pinch of poverty etched a scar in him for the rest of his life and he always strove to fight for the underdogs. It is noted that at an early age Jack felt the need to seek the betterment of the working class. While still at school he wrote an essay, "Optimism, Pessimism and Patriotism," which was published in the school magazine, "The Aegis" in 1895. Here he depicted the evils of the rich in depriving the commoner in their attainment of education and keeping them totally ignorant about the utility of education because the rich feared the consequence and its impact on the commoner. In it he pointed out the evils of capitalism—the long hours, the low wages and the social and moral degradation that flowed from these evils. He urged the masses, "ye Americans, patriots and optimists to awake! Seize the reins of a corrupted government and educate the masses." The reaction of those at school convinced Jack that he would never be able to reach the masses and enlighten them up in their upliftment.

Jack gives a reporter's account of the effect of the demeaned people on the downtrodden and their plight in his sociological study, The People of the Abyss. He portrays the life of the urban poor of London's East End, so graphically that one sits up chilled. It is replete with factual data
which lends authenticity. Jack writes that it was the debased attitude of the British rich which had resulted in the squalor, dirt and filth in the East End. It was this very attitude, Jack observes, which had resulted in the loss of their manhood and distortion of their physical appearance:

Nowhere in the streets of London may one escape the sight of abject poverty, while five minute's walk from almost any point will bring one to a slum; but the region my hansom was now penetrating was one ending slum. The streets were filled with a new and different race of people, short of stature, and of wretched or beer-sodden appearance. We rolled along through miles of brick and squalor, and from each cross street and alley flashed long vistas of bricks and misery. Here and there lurched a drunken man or women, and the air was obscene with sounds of jangling and squabbling. At a market, tottery old men and women were searching in the garbage thrown in the mud for rotten potatoes, beans, and vegetables, which little children clustered like flies around a festering mass of fruit. thrusting their arms to the shoulders into the liquid corruption, and drawing forth morsels but artificially decayed, which they devoured on the spot.*4*

He further states the unwanted, undesirable creations of the indifferent society and of men being forced out of labour market due to an advancement of old age:

From the slimy, spittle-drenched sidewalk, they were picking up bits of orange peel, apple skin, and grape stems, and they were eating them.... They picked up stray crumbs of bread the size of peas, apple cores so black and dirty one would not take them to be apples cores... and this, between six and seven'o'clock in the evening August 20, year of our lord 1902, in the heart of the greatest, wealthiest, and most powerful empire the world has ever seen.*5*

Jack in another passage shows the result of British tradition of sending only the able-bodied poor into the military service which has resulted in a race of dwarfed and
violence-oriented men at home:

The constant selection of the best from the workers has impoverished those who are left, a sadly degraded reminder, for the great part, which, in the ghetto, sinks to the deepest depths. The wine of life has been drawn off to spill itself in blood and progeny over the rest of the earth. Those that remain are the less, and they are segregated and steeped in themselves. They become indecent and bestial. When they kill, they kill with their hands, and then stupidly surrender themselves to the executioners. There is no splendid audacity about their transgressions. They gouge a mate with a dull knife, or beat his head in with an iron pot, and then sit down and wait for the police. Wife-beating is the masculine prerogative of matrimony. They wear remarkable boots of brass and iron, and when they have polished off the mother of their children with a black eye or so, they knock her down and proceed to trample her very much as a western stallion tramples a rattlesnake. *6*

The conditions described by Jack in his study provided a natural haven for the festering of disease along with a high degree of suicide and crime. He placed the blame of such an injustice on the English economic system which made the rich richer and the poor, poorer. He foresaw that the mismanagement of the country would continue and people would continue to suffer with the gap widening between the rich and the poor if no change occurred. Jack suggests that this grave problem could be solved if the distribution of production is directed in a more favourable proportion to the needs of all the people.

Jack was always concerned with the downtrodden and irrespective of his different philosophies in his writings, for their benefit he tried to infuse and overlap each one of
them. He tried to reconcile the Nietzschean philosophy with those of Marxism and from it arose the question of a superman working for the benefit of the average man and their upliftment. In his essay, "Wanted A New Law of Development," Jack writes, "Why should there be an empty belly in all the world, when the work of ten men can feed a hundred? What if my brother be not so strong as I? He has not sinned. Wherefore should he suffer hunger - he and his sinless little ones? Away with the old law. There is food and shelter for all, therefore let all receive food and shelter." Jack stated here that the historical law of development was a natural selection with an assurance of the survival of only the strong and their progeny. He wrote, "The weeding out of human souls, some for fatness and smiles, some for leaness and tears, is surely a heartless selection process - as heartless as it is natural." And while at the same time the law of development continued to operate, social forces will also be operating in its own place and goading the common people to change the law and one day this will inevitably lead to their success. It is an irony that even with all these affirmation in class brotherhood, Jack closed his essay with a question for which he had no clear cut answer: "What will be the new law of development?" We can generalize that he foresaw a situation where irrespective of their lineage, everybody will have an equal chance of survival and it can also mean that progress would stop and deterioration would set in.
Jack's other essay, "The Question of the Maximum" had initially no taker for its publication and when an Eastern magazine did purchase it, they failed in publishing it because of its radical theme. Jack believed that socialism was inevitable and individual fulfillment was through socialism. He delivered this essay on November 25, 1899 at the meeting of the Oakland Socialist Labour Party, wherein he urged the people that any movement towards its development had to have a maximum limit which will lead to an overall change in all direction like social, economic, and commercial. He says that the industrialized nations will try to find a market for itself and in the process, friction will develop, leading nations to fight for a market. This would result in the eventual confrontation between the capitalist and the educated and wise workers and in the process the workers will emerge victorious. Even though the failure of the workers might result in the growth of an oligarchy, evolution would assure the relentless rise of the common man. And he concluded:

The procession of ages has marked not only the rise of man, but the rise of the common man. From the chattel slave, or the serf chained to the soil, to the highest seats in modern society, he has risen, rung by rung, amid the crumbling of the divine right of kings and the crush of falling sceptres. That he has done this, only in the end to pass into the perpetual slavery of the industrial oligarch, is something at which his whole past cries in protest. The common man is worthy of a better future, or else he is not worthy of his past. *9*
In a similar essay, "What Communities lose by the Competitive System," which was quite toned down to fit the mood of the editors, as it hardly breathes the revolutionary fervour of his later essays, Jack argues in a calm and logical way the evils of the capitalist system. He shows in it how competition leads to harassment and duplication of work. He writes that the collective urge of mankind will lead them to unite in overthrowing the ills of the competitive system and a planned society will emerge where people will be able to develop a sense of aestheticism. Jack points out that man's primacy proceeded from his gregarious instinct and his consciousness of the power of cooperation and their early experience established, "that strength lay in numbers... in solidarity of effort... against the hostile elements of his environment." Jack lamented the loss of expensive public utilities and services due to the lack of cooperation and tremendous inefficiency of the capitalist society. He endorsed that a cooperative commonwealth was the only remedy to combat the ills of the competitive system which not only bred inefficiency but selfishness too. Once the basic amenities of life were provided the poor who were poor due to the lack of education would be able to comprehend the beautiful. He writes that art should "pervade the interstices of life" only when the "belly - need was made a subsidiary accompaniment of life instead... of its sole aim (could) the whole community enjoy, appreciate and understand the work of one who has toiled at creating the
beautiful". "Jack exposed in this essay his own frustration as an artist in a capitalistic society when he wrote the following:

The artist exerts himself for a very small audience indeed. The general public never attains a standard of comprehension; it cannot measure his work. It looks upon his wares in the light of curiosities, baubles, luxuries, blind to the fact that they are objects which should conduce to the highest pleasure. And herein great injury is done to the artist, and heavy limitation are laid upon him. But so long as "society flourishes by the antagonism of units" art, in its full, broad scope, will have neither place nor significance, the artist will not receive justice for his travail, nor the people compensation for their labor in the common drudgery of life."12"

Jack by temperament felt that a change in the society for the upliftment of the common people would take ages if the sleeping bones of the bourgeoisie were not rattled by furious speeches, articles and essays, by the emerging class of socialist. And the poor would lie unaware if they were not told about the atrocities done to them. While he went around declaring the mass awakening of the proletariat in his articles and speeches,

he at the same time repeatedly disclaimed the extremes of anarchism in his lectures, even though they bristled with the rhetoric of force. Outstanding piece of socialist writings like, "The Scab," "Class struggle" and "Revolution," to name a few, appeared in print. Jack quoted them extensively in a fearless manner and forthright presentation to wake the bourgeoisie from
their slumber and sometimes he was so eloquent that he was able to rouse the crowded lecture hall into hostility. He proclaimed that a class awakening would take place not only in America but in all parts of the world where the wage worker suffered at the hands of the capitalists. The people would then awake to the dangers of the uprising and stem the tide of radicalism by introducing reforms.

His two socialistic writings, "The Class Struggle" and "The scab" illustrates Jack's ability to tackle a difficult subject and simplifying them for the understanding of a political illiterate. It also reveals Jack's capacity in applying Marxism to the American conditions. "The Class Struggle" was published in the New York, "Independent," of November 5, 1903 wherein he sets out to destroy one of the cherished myths of American capitalism: that there is no class struggle in American society. It is noted here that Jack was less concerned with evolutionery theory, which were strongly present in his previous writings like, "Wanted: A New Law of Development" and "The Question of the Maximum," and more with class struggle and competition between groups of people, instead of individuals. Jack tried to demonstrate the presence of class struggle theoretically and historically:

That there are even classes in the United States is vigorously denied by many; but it is incontrovertible, when a group of individuals is formed, wherein the members are bound together by common interests which are peculiarly their interests and not the interests of
individuals outside the group, that such a group is a class. The owners of capital, with their dependents, form a class of this nature in the United States: the working people from a similar class.

Jack, no doubt had been influenced by great major thinkers of those days but in his socialist writings he tried to show his leanings toward Marxism and the unhealthy survival of a Nietzsche follower. He points out in his essay, "The Class Struggle", the reaction of the working class towards the tenets of Nietzsche: "They refuse to be the 'glad perishers' so glowingly described by Nietzsche."

At the same time Jack drew on his reading of the Communist Manifesto and reiterated a Marxist view of history:

The history of society," they say, "is a history of class struggle." Patrician struggled with plebeian in early Rome, the king and the burghers, with the nobles of the Middle Ages, later on, the king and the nobles with the bourgeoisie; and today the struggle is on between the triumphant bourgeoisie and the rising proletariat. By "proleteriat" is meant the class of people without capital which sells its labor for a living."14".

Jack saw a sign of revolt among workers all over the industrial front in the form of demands for an increased share of the joint product. He believed that this revolt would shortly be channeled into a political assault on society, as both the capitalist and the proletariat will fight for a take over. There will be temporary outcome depending upon the sheer might of the group having superior strength. Thereafter Jack closes his essay with the words whose meaning is left to be deciphered by the interpreters:
"It is no longer a question of whether or not there is a class struggle. The question now is what will be the outcome of the class struggle?"

Jack's other essay, "The Scab", published at the same time shows the evidence of his concern with the major problem confronting the working class. He tries to show that the emergence of a scab is the result of the existence of a class struggle between labour and capital. It is also noted that the essay is a poor reflector of the problem and is lacking in its rigorous class analysis. His definition of a scab is so wide that one fails to understand what Jack had in his mind. He defined a scab as one who was driven by economic necessity to take food and shelter from another labourer by accepting lower wages and he differentiates between them as one who is utilized by employers to break strikes and the other who puts in more labour and does more work for the same wage than the previous labourer. But the difference is somewhat glossed over as he further elaborates them in his discussion. One is at a loss to understand what actually Jack is driving at and thus he leads one to draw a conclusion that practically everyone scab in a society where men struggle with one another for food and shelter — worker against worker, capitalist against capitalist and nation against nation. Jack poses this dilemma — to be a scab was treason to one's fellow and not to be one was to be branded as selfish, stingy and unchristian. He concludes that as long as competitive society
existed, a scab will be its natural organ and it will be eliminated only with the arrival of public corporate system.

Even though this essay is loose in its use of terminology and is poor in its analysis: of man scabbing on their fellow-workers, employers employing scabs to destroy the power of unions, and why strike-breakers are being paid more than their fellow-workers, and why Negroes and women works as a scab on their own will: the essay with all these weaknesses remains an important theoretical discussion of a phenomenon extremely common in a cut-throat competitive system. Jack in this essay demonstrated that the strike breakers were simply another mercenary in the army of the capitalist to crush the organizations of labour and by this he tried to prove that the scab was no American hero as it was being hailed by some. Later on, Jack described, in a more forceful manner the definition of a scab which provided the labour movement of those days with an eloquent and forceful weapon in their struggle against capitalism that even today it deserves a mention in full:

After God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad and the vampire, he had some awful substance left with which he made a SCAB. A SCAB is a two-legged animal with a corkscrew soul, a water-logged brain, and a combination backbone made of jelly and glue. Where others have hearts he carries a tumor of rotten principles. When a SCAB comes down the street men turn their backs and angels weep in heaven, and the devil shuts the gates of hell to keep him out. No man has a right to
SCAB as long as there is a pool of water deep enough to drown his body in, or a rope long enough to hang his carcass with. Judas Iscariot was a gentleman compared with a SCAB. For betraying his Master, he had character enough to hang himself. A SCAB HASN'T!

Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Judas Iscariot sold his Savior for thirty pieces of silver. Benedict Arnold sold his country for a promise of a commission, in the British Army. The modern strikebreaker sells his birthright, his country, his wife, his children, and his fellow-men for an unfulfilled promise from his employer, trust or corporation. Esau was a traitor to his county, Judas Iscariot was a traitor to this God. Benedict Arnold was a traitor to his country.

A STRIKEBREAKER IS A TRAITOR TO HIS GOD, HIS COUNTRY, HIS FAMILY AND HIS CLASS! *16*

Jack's popularity had increased with the success of *The Sea-Wolf* and he was inspired by the Russian revolution of 1905, with new zeal. At the same time American socialist movement was gathering momentum with requests pouring in for Jack from all sorts of groups to deliver speeches. Jack received an invitation to address the students of the University of California at Berkeley and he intended to deliver a stinging blow right between the eyes of his listeners whom he termed as the prodigees of the capitalist.

So on January 20, 1905, instead of a discourse on literature, he gave them his sermon, "Revolution" and his opening words soon rang around the country:

Yesterday morning I received a letter from a man in Arizona. It began, "Dear Comrade," and ended "Yours for the Revolution." I answered that letter this morning. I began, "Dear comrade," and I ended, "Yours for the Revolution."

There are 5,000,000 men in the United States beginning and ending their letters as our letters were begun and ended. There are 1,000,000 men in France. 3,000,000 men in Germany ... as ours were begun and ended.

Now what do these facts mean? They mean that the
Revolution is here. Now. We are in it. It goes on every
day. No man can escape it...the German Socialist hails
the French Socialist with the same word. that we
California Socialist hail each other. the noble word.
COMRADE.*17*.

Jack wrote in it of his own experience. pointing out the
mismanagement of the capitalist class in a vivid yet plain
expression so that the working class readers could
understand it. He delivered this essay with little changes
throughout the period of 1905 to 1909 and even though it
indicated his shift towards revolutionery rhetoric with an
acceptance of violence as a legitimate tactic of class
struggle: it still resembled his previous essay: which
blamed the capitalist class for the woes of the proletariat.
Like a parish - priest addressing his huge gathering of
parishioners Jack tried to coax his audience about the evils
of the capitalist system and the vile consequences which
sprang forth from it:

The revolution is a fact. It is here now ... not only
is it a cold-blooded economic propaganda. but it is in
essence a religious propaganda. with a fey or in it of
Paul and Christ: the capitalist class has been
indicted. It has failed in its management and its
management is to be taken away from it.*18*

He put forth various questions like: why were these men
socialist. what drove them to work for this revolution. why
did they so willingly work for it. go to the prison or into
the exile and also why were they prepared to die for it. He
spoke to them about his experiences citing newspaper
articles and reports, and stated that capitalism had failed in its management and were guilty of wastage of resources and it was unjust and exploitative in nature:

The capitalist class managed society, and its management has failed. And not only has it failed in its management, but it has failed deplorably, ignobly, horribly...
The time has come for the revolution to demand consideration.
The revolutionist cries out upon wrong and injustice and preaches righteousness. The revolution is a fact... and take the management away. The revolution is here, now. Stop it who can.*19*

It were these faults that were keeping the revolutionists alive. They will keep fighting for its cause till that day when they would be able to replace the capitalist system with a better society. He spoke about the socialist idea of achievement:

We propose to destroy present-day civilization, that is, capitalist civilization with its brutal struggle of man with man for life - by the ballot, where it is free. be it forever remembered - and replace it by a better civilization, a civilization whose principle shall be "Each for all and all for each."*20*

He compared the life of the modern urban man unfavourably with the caveman's existence. He tried to explain to them that if there was proper utilization of natural resources and its production were distributed evenly under the auspicious control of socialist then there would be no material want and wretchedness, no more children striving to earn a living, no more men, women and babies living like animals and dying like beasts. Jack offered his listeners
the grace of socialism:

The revolutionists offer everything that is clean, noble and alive. They offer service, unselfishness, sacrifice, martyrdom - the things that sting and awake the imagination of the people, touching their hearts with the fervor that arises out of the impulse toward good and which is essentially religious in its nature.*21*

Jack's article, "Explanation of the Great Socialist Vote of 1904," tried to point out that the favourable response to the socialist vote were due to the imposing philosophic and scientific literature behind the socialist movement and the untiring workers who were willing to sacrifice for the cause. He proclaimed that the votes cast by the Americans were those, "who have raised the red banner of revolt." No doubt Jack's article failed in portraying the correct picture of the socialist vote but it did bring to the minds of the Americans that they were dealing with a world-wide phenomenon, a truly fundamental movement, and not a shooting star:

In the history of man, socialism is the first movement of men to involve the whole globe. None has been so widespread, so far reaching. It as international and world-wide.*22*

At the same time Jack demonstrated again that not Nietzsche, Spenser, Kidd or Haeckel but Marx and Engels dominated his thinking when he had the people in his mind. He glowingly praised the Japanese socialist pronouncement that "for us socialist there is no boundaries, race, country or nationality."
Jack’s most brilliant article, "Something Rotten in Idaho" appeared in the "Chicago Daily Socialist" on November 4, 1906 which was the result of the famous Moyer - Haywood - Pettibone case wherein three leaders of the Western Federation of Miners were accused and convicted for murder of former Governor, Steunenberg on the confession of a man having criminal record. The presentation of the article is a clear-cut indictment of the capitalist system, of capitalist justice and the profit motive. It is prudent, thought provoking, exciting and challenging article and compels the reader, no matter what their political convictions might be, to draw a conclusion that these three workers were in danger of dying for a crime they had never committed, because they stood between the mine owners and a pot of money. It ranks as one of the finest piece of working -class propaganda Jack ever wrote and stands as a testimonial to his devotion to the labour movement and his readiness to use his great talent on its behalf. It was major a contribution in the struggle which eventually resulted in the freeing of the three men.

His next article of note on class struggle was the comparative study, "Strike Methods: American and Australian." It was a penetrating article contrasting the strike methods; American and Australian." It was a penetrating article contrasting the strike methods in the United States and Australia. It had the same old Jack vitality: assertion of the class struggle, indictment of capitalist
mismanagement and prediction that the future belonged to the labourer.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS.

Jack's writing can be divided basically into two categories one which he wrote for money and those wherein he sympathised with the disinhirer of the social order and which made him at one time the best known American Socialist outside United States of America. It was in his socialist writings that the traces of autobiographical elements were strongly evident. He wrote about his conversions to socialism in his major essays. "How I became a Socialist. The Road - a chronicle of tramp life, the experience of which is strongly spilled out in his novels. Jack's writing dealing with the theme of socialism occupies an important place in the American tradition of protest and revolt. and even with his contradictions and short comings, he stands out as one of the outstanding interpreters and champions of the American Socialist movement prior to the First World War. His autobiographical novels like, Martin Eden, John
Barleycorn, and story, "The Apostate," is a clear reflection
of his feelings and unique contribution towards socialism.

Jack's article, "How I became a Socialist," describes
his conversion to socialism in a religious term:

To return to my conversion. I think it is apparent that
my rampant individualism was pretty effectively
hammered out of me, and something else effectively
hammered in. But, just as I had been an individualist
without knowing it. I was now a Socialist without
knowing it, withal, an unscientific one. I had been
reborn, but not renamed, and I was running around to
find out what manner of thing I was. I ran back to
California and opened the books."25"

Here he talks about his experience on the road, of his
gradual realization of the evils of capitalism and
callousness of society in taking up men for its use of
brawn and muscle and discarding them in useless heaps. He
writes about these down - and - outcast of the unemployed:

I found all sorts of men, many of whom had once been as
good as myself and just as blond - beastly: sailor
men, soldiers - men, labour - men, all wrenched and
distorted and twisted out of shape by toil and
hardship and accident, and cast adrift by their
masters like so many old horses."26"

The experience of the road aroused a strong fear in him that
some day this too would be his fate. Terror seized him after
he peered into the abyss of poverty and he took an oath to
climb out of the pit, not by his muscles, but by using his
brain. He vowed:

May God strike me dead if I do another day's hard work
with my body then I absolutely have to do."27"
In the same essay he said that before his experience of the road, he had never heard of a school called "individualism" but "sang the paean of the strong with all my heart." He had been proud of his good health, hard muscles and was aware of holding himself up at work or in a fight:

And I looked ahead into long vistas of a hazy and interminable future into which playing what I conceived to be a MAN'S game. I should continue to travel with unfailing health without accidents, and with muscles ever vigorous. As I say, his future was interminable. I could see myself only raging through life without end like one of Nietzsche's blond beasts, lustfully roving and conquering by sheer superiority and strength.*29*

The trip was a jolt in a number of ways for Jack. He became aware that he would be forced into prison again or he would remain a manual labourer if he remained in the company of hoboes and petty criminals of the waterfront. And this realization aroused in him a desperate attempt to escape the social pit and which became merged in his mind with the struggle of his entire class. He talks about his rebellion against this system and his investigation about its possible curses. It were these experiences that led him to socialism with a promise that it would provide him an ultimate success.

Jack's essay, written after his withdrawal from the active work of the intercollegiate Socialist Society, "What life Means to Me," is probably the finest piece of autobiographical writing ever written by him. It is a
retrospection through the years with an evaluation of his own experiences up to the time when he first gained a true perspective on life - the time when he was able to see the part played by socialist philosophy in his life. Even with all the ups and downs in his life, the cruel bitter experience, he concludes the essay with a reaffirmation of his faith in the inevitable triumph of socialism:

And last of all, my faith is in the working class. As some Frenchmen has said, "The stairway of time is ever echoing with the wooden shoes going up, the polished boot descending." *30*.

In the same essay, he talks about his early impression of the intellectual and spiritual fineness of the society "above" him:

Up above me. I knew were unselfishness of the spirit, clean and noble thinking, keen intellectual living. I knew all this because I read "seaside library" novels, in which, with the exception of the villians and adventureuses, all men and women thought beautiful thoughts, spoke a beautiful tongue and performed glorious deeds."*31*.

This sentiment of Jack London is echoed in a similar literary model. Martin Eden, wherein Eden's perception of Ruth Morse and her world is seen and felt as he sits at the Morse dinner table for the first time. Eden is charmed by the aesthetic and intellectual aura he greedily breaths in:

He was feasting his love of beauty at this table where eating was aesthetic function. It was an intellectual function, too. His mind was stirred...The romance and beauty, and high vigor of the books were coming true. He was in that rare and blissful state wherein a man
sees his dream stalk out from the crannies of fantasy and become fact.*32*

The bourgeois values which Jack so eagerly looked forward to acquire turned out to be very short lived leading to his disillusionment with the bourgeois class. Here he discovered the empty, vain, foppish ladies who were no different from the females of the lower class, and this led to further disappointment with the class Jack was struggling to enter. He writes in Martin Eden:

His idea, for which the novels were responsible, had been that only formal proposals obtained in the upper classes. It was all right enough, down whence he had come, for youths and maidens to win each other by contact; but for the exalted personages up above on the heights to make love in similar fashion had seemed unthinkable. Yet the novels were wrong. Here was a proof of it. The same pressures and caresses, unaccompanied by speech, that were efficacious with the girls of the working class. They were all of the same flesh, after all, sisters under their skins; and he might have known as much himself had he remembered his Spencer.*33*

The same sentiment, he writes in "What life means to Me:

Society opened its portals to me. I entered right in on the parlor floor, and my disillusionment proceeded rapidly. I sat down to dinner with the masters of society, and with the wives and daughters of the masters of society. The women were gowned beautifully. I admit; but to my naive surprise I discovered that they were of the same clay as all the rest of the women I had known down below in the cellor. "The colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady were sisters under their skins"—and gowns.*34*

His bitter disillusionment with success grew out of his
naive assumption that by leaving the working class he was escaping from the oppression of a class, least being aware that the class he was entering had its own oppression in the most discreet camouflaged way. He tried to look at the "naked simplicities" of life but even that proved to be difficult as "naked simplicities"-reduced human life a worthless affair, with people becoming in fact commodities. He realized this when he saw himself slipping into the abyss:

I saw the naked simplicities of the complicated civilization in which I lived. Life was a matter of food and shelter. In order to get food and shelter men sold things. The merchant sold shoes, the politician sold his manhood, and the representative of the people, with exceptions, of course, sold his trust: while nearly all sold their honor, women, too, whether on the street or in the holy bond of wedlock, were prone to sell their flesh. All things were commodities, all people bought and sold. 35

Jack's life was struggle and it was struggle which kept him alive. After being disillusioned with the bourgeois class he tried to save himself from slipping into the abyss by believing in the people - in short socialism. He writes at the end of the essay, "I retain my belief in the nobility and excellence of the human. I believe that spiritual sweetness and unselfishness will conquer the gras gullotry of today." 36 Jack reports this return to the people in John Barleycorn and writes, "what really saved me was the one remaining illusion - the PEOPLE." This similarity is seen when John Barleycorn is coolly contemplating about
suicide and is so preoccupied with the idea of ending his life that in fear he gives away his revolver lest he shoots himself in his sleep. This self-protective gesture on his part is Jack's renewed faith in the cause of the people as he draws from his own experience when he writes:

I grew afraid of my revolver - afraid during the period in which the radiant flashing vision of the PEOPLE was forming in my mind and will. So obsessed was I with the desire to die, that I feared I might commit the act in my sleep, and I was compelled to give my revolver away to others who were to lose it for me where my subconscious hand might not find it. But the PEOPLE saved me. By the PEOPLE was I handcuffed to life.*37*

The publication of The Road was criticised by Jack's bourgeois friends and the critical opinion of his close friend, George Sterling, pinched him the most, for depicting himself as a former jail bird and a common tramp. Hurt by his disapproval, Jack wrote to Sterling: "I cannot get a line on why you wish I hadn't written The Road. It is all true. It is what I am, what I have done, and it is part of the process by which I have become. Is it a lingering taint of the bourgeois in you that makes you object? Is it because of my shamelessness? For having done things in which I saw or see no shame?" Here Jack talks about the helplessness of the American labourers in his article, "The Tramp" where they are used by the capitalist and then thrown out to fall to the bottom of the social scale:

Thus there is no encouragement for the unfit, inefficient, and mediocre. Their very inefficiency and

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mediocrity make them helpless as cattle and add to their misery. And the whole tendency for such is downward... living like beasts, breeding like beasts, dying like beasts. They are sweated in the slums in an atmosphere of discouragement...and despair. There is no strength in weakness, no encouragement in foul air, vile food, and dark dens. There are there because they are so made that they are not fit to be higher up; but filth and obscenity do not strengthen the neck nor does chronic emptiness of belly stiffen the back. 39.

We note a strong parallelism in Jack’s experience of the Erie Country Penitentiary and the abduction of Buck in The Call of the Wild. Jack mentions in The Road that early one fine morning while walking down the street in Niagara Fall, to witness and enjoy the beauty of the roaring fall, he was arrested for vagrancy and sentenced along with sixteen other hoboes with a trail which was nothing but a farce and mockery of the so called free citizens. Jack watched the sentencing and could not believe that the same things would happen to him.

They are poor dumb cattle, I thought to myself. But wait till my turn comes: I’ll give his Honor a “spiel”.... my American blood was up. Behind me were the many generation of my American ancestry. One of the kinds of liberty those ancestors of mine had fought and died for was the right of trail by jury. This was my heritage, stained sacred by their blood, and it devolved upon me to stand up for it. All right. I threatened to myself; just wait till he gets to me. 40

Jack tried to speak about his rights but was cut short by the judge. “thirty days”, and on his persistence, was told to “shut up” in the most inhuman callous way. And the judge continued in his official manner without even bothering to look up again which arouses in Jack the memory off his
I'd show them. But when I asked for a lawyer, I was laughed at. Habeas corpus was all right, but of what good was it to me when I could communicate with no one outside the jail? But I'd show them. They couldn't keep me in jail forever. Just wait till I got out, that was all I'd make them sit up. I knew something about the law and my own rights, and I'd expose their maladministration of justice. Visions of damage suits and sensational newspaper headlines were dancing before my eyes when the jailers came in and began hustling as into the main office. *41*

Jack gets a sentence of thirty days, he is shaved, handcuffed and put in prison cloth and sent by boxcar to the penitentary and like Buck his rash anger is replaced by cunning. He hears stories from the other prisoners, "of personal experiences with the police of great cities that were awful, and more awful were the hearsay tales they told me concerning men who had died at the hands of the police and who therefore could not testify for themselves". Even though Jack had seen much of the world's underside, he was scarcely prepared for the horror he was to witness and thus scoffs at these tales, until he sees them with his "own eyes", there in that prison, things unbelievable and monstrous. One feels that Jack tried not to remember the horrible ordeal of those thirty days— as some experience are best unrecorded and unremembered. He learnt the most bitter and unforgettable lesson from the mulatto, just as Buck learns that there is no fair play once you are down. Both Buck and Jack realizes that there is no code for survival and to survive in a hostile environment they hoave to have strength
and cunning and this leads to their initiation into the world of theft—Jack becomes the hallman and Buck steals a chunk of bacon.

The problem which confronts and perplexes the interpreters of Jack's autobiographical work is the tendency of London to dramatize his life in his writings. In such work as, "The Apostate," "Tales of the Fish Patrol" and John Barleycorn, Jack stressed the poverty and the adventures of his formative years, with some of the description being sensationalized and others being fudged on the truth. It is a task for one to say that these paragraphs are the exact replica of his life, but at the same time it does throw an important part of the light, and with caution we can infer that the life which he describes in his autobiographical writings are very much similar to his own life. But to overlook the advantages of fictionalizing here and there on key points, and improving even the most interesting autobiography, shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the literary craft. Jack's most autobiographical writing and self-conscious novel, "Martin Eden" shares the two well-established modes of fiction: the novel of success and the novel of education. It is much closer to his own experience than any he had previously written—showing how a mind much like his own had been formed and how a success much like his own had been achieved—his cosmic theories, his Spencerism and materialistic monism, plays a greater part here than in his other fiction. It presents a version of the whole sailor
- to - sage period of Jack's own life with slight modification though cruically, fictionalized. The story of Martin Eden as London affirmed literary career is concerned. Martin Eden, product of a deprived, working-class home, is an energetic and adventurous outgoing sailor who through accident, is introduced into an affluent bourgeoise family circle where touched by the way of the household especially. Ruth Morse, he firmly resoloves and conceives the immediate burning desire to win a place in her world. He determines upon writing as a suitable outlet for his own natural talents. The core of the novel depicts his long, weary struggle for self-education as a thinker and acceptance as a writer; a struggle known to anyone to whom London's own career is known.

We can take few parellel extracts to show the autobiographical element between Jack and Martin Eden. It is a well known fact about Jack's compromise with the magazines in order to create a market for his short stories. He writes in the summer of 1897 to Johns:

I early learned that there were two natures in me. This caused me a great deal of trouble, till I worked out a philosophy of life and struck a compromise between the flesh and the spirit. Too great an ascendancy of either was to be abnormal, and since normality is almost a fetish of mine. I finally succeeded in balancing both natures.... I have small regard for an utter brute or for an utter saint.*43*

This statement, and similar ones, allows one to presume that Marten Eden's literary theory is a statement of
London's own. Martin, early in his career learns to avoid both romantic and realistic cliches in his works but to combine the best elements of both realism and romance:

He had discovered, in the course of his reading, two schools of fiction. One treated of men as a god, ignoring his earthly origin; the other treated of man as a clod, ignoring his heaven-sent dreams and divine possibilities. Both the god and the clod schools erred, in Martin's estimation, and erred through too great singleness of sight and purpose. Their was a compromise that approximated the truth, though it flattered not the school of god, while it challenged the brute-savageness of the school of clod.*44*

Jack's apprenticeship years finds an echo in his writing and like his autobiographical hero, Martin Eeden, he learned the "formula" for successful stories.

The formula consists of three parts:
(1) a pair of lovers are jarred apart;
(2) by some deed or event they are united;
(3) marriage bells.
The third part was an unvarying quantity but the first and second parts could be varied an infinite number of times.*45*

Jack did place one of these formula stories, "In the Times of Prince Charley." The story has a protagonist, Griffen Risingham who is one of the captain of king, George II and is guardian of the captive Prince Charly. He falls in love with a noble Highland beauty and one night these two lovers are interrupted by a dashing black-bearded Highlander who embraces lady Aline and releases Prince Charly and departs with the willing Aline to France. (1)Giffin after a year is

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on a secret mission in France where by chance he encounters the bearded antagonist who reveals with suspense that he is Aline's brother. (2) Griffins laments about his short sightedness and wonders whether he would be forgiven by lady Aline and no doubt in due course is forgiven. (3) The story has villains, heroes, duels, high passion and noble sentiment - all highly, marketable. Jack London, like Martin Eden had learned that these stories:

Should never be tragic, should never end unhappily, and should never contain beauty of language, subtlety of thought, nor real delicacy of sentiment. Sentiment it must contain, plenty of it, pure and noble, of the sort that in my early youth had brought applause.”

There are innumerable scences bringing forth this parallelism, eg the scene considered to be parts of Martin Eden where it depicts the intolerable condition of the sweat shops shows the art of Jack London in investing the laundry scene in this great autobiographical novel with authencity. Martin Eden is also an interesting psychoanalytical study of Jack’s schizoid personality, which I do not dwell here as good articles on this aspect has already been written.

It is a common critical trap to infer from Jack’s writing his personal life, especially that part of John Barleycorn dealing with his drinking and leading to his early death. But we can say that many ideas present in his writing resembled him in real life. In John Barleycorn he writes about his long sickness - his despair with life - after attainment of success, fame and money as illusions, he
was spared from suicide by "the PEOPLE", in short socialism:

...the PEOPLE saved me. By the PEOPLE was I hand
cuffed to life. There was still one fight left in me,
and here was the things for which to fight. I threw all
precaution to the winds, threw myself with fiercer zeal
into the fight for socialism... love, socialism, the
PEOPLE... were the things that cured and saved me.*47*

Jack's other novel, The Little Lady of the Big House,
resembles in characterization of its protagonist with Jack's
physical appearance but with some minor difference. It is
virtually a perfect physical, self-potrait by London.

Five feet, ten inches in height. weighing a clean-
muscled one hundred eighty pounds. Dick Forrest was
anything but insignificant for a forty years' old man.
(Jack's approximate age when the book was published).
The eyes were gray, large, over-arched by bone of brow,
and lashes and brows were dark. The hair... was light
brown to chestnut... the tan of forehead faded in
advertisement of the rim of the Baden Powell (hat)
terposed between him and the sun. Laughter lurked in
the mouth corners and eye corners, and there were cheek
lines about the mouth that would seem to have been
formed by laughter.*48*

London writes to Cloudesty Johns (1899): "... As to foto of
myself.... Have but one. But I'll do this: tell you all
about me... stand five foot... eight in stocking feet...
jump... greenish-grey eyes, heavy brows... brown hair ... .
Face bronzed...." As for the rest, consult any photograph
of Jack.

Most of Jack's writing have the presence of
autobiographical elements. Quite a few have pointed out the
parallelism between White Fang and his creator as there are
obvious similarities, psychological if not literal, between
the dog-hero's violent initiation and London's own agonizing
childhood and subsequent struggle to escape the cold
wilderness of poverty. Jack's traumatic experience of the
cannery ordeal got engraved with his everlasting feelings
and it finds an expression in his short story, "The
Apostate" which was emotionally if not literally
autobiographical, with slight exaggeration about his own
childhood. Jack wrote of "Johnny " 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 being weighed and sifted every
hour of his toil, every movement of his hands, every
twitch of his muscles, and preparations were making for
a future course of action that would amaze him and his
little world.*50*

Jack responded to man's unending struggle against
ruthless and exploitative forces of capitalism by depicting
the various situations, when the hunger and want drove him
to become a tramp, a scab and a socialist. His experience
finds an outlet in his essays and articles where he states
that a capitalist society is degrading for mankind as it
creates slums increases poverty and hard labour leading to
debasement of humanity in general. These experience turns
him to socialism wherein he says that the problems
confronting the downtrodden can find an outlet if they
accepted the tenets of socialism. His discussion and
analysis of the problems of the wage labourer is not
confined only to United States but to the entire community of the world. No doubt his yearnings and aspirations finds an outlet in his autobiographical writings but he makes it subservient to the objective reality which he mirrors in his works with full fidelity. It also enlightens us about the paradox of individualism and socialism existing in his writings which in turns enriches us about his sociological imagination. At the same time he perfected this individual-social conflict on a larger canvas and broadened ours as well as his sphere of socialism.

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5. Ibid. p. 78.

6. Ibid. p. 257.


10. Ibid. p. 411.

11. Ibid. p. 423.


13. Ibid. p. 426.


15. Ibid. p. 440.


17. Ibid, pp. 88-89.

18. Ibid. p. 477.


22. Ibid, p. 397.


27. Ibid, p.353.
34. Foner p.390.
35. Ibid, p.388.
40. Ibid, p.358.
42. Ibid, p.349.
48. London, *The Little Lady of the Big House* (New York,
