



The Game and The Abysmal Brute

Jack London

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Two novellas about Prize-Fighters:

"THE GAME" is superficially the story of a prize fight and it is a good story. Considered only as a description of the fight it would make the fortune of any sporting editor in America. For most readers this with the love story that runs along with it will be all that is seen, but those who know Jack London as a socialist will see that "The Game" is the story of a bigger fight than ever took place within the squared circle. It is the game of life that is being fought throughout the book, the game in which the struggle for success swallows up the participant, in which skill, brains and training tell for much, but which at last may be decided by a lucky punch. It is intensely realistic, even to the extent of animalism at times.

The illustrations and decorations by Henry Hutt and T. C. Lawrence are striking features of the book. The pen drawings which open the chapters are ghastly strong at times.

At the time, Jack London's fame as an author was being pushed close by his notoriety as a socialist. At least that is the way the some critics put it. The trouble with London is that he is not the ordinary kind of a literary socialist. It would be easy to name a half dozen prominent writers of the previous decade who have occasionally admitted that they were socialists, but their socialism was generally of such a mild inoffensive sort that it didn't hurt them much with their capitalist friends.

London, however, is the genuine, old fashioned, proletarian, class struggle, etc., socialist. His socialism is like everything else about him, virile, combative and a tough back bone.

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From *The Book of Jack London*, Volume 2 by Charmian London:

“On September 9, Jack went to Colma, as one of a constellation of *The Examiner's* star writers, to do the Britt-Nelson prizefight. It was in the course of this write-up he coined another catch-phrase that went into the language of the country, as "the call of the wild," "the white silence," and even "the game" had become almost household words. This time it was "the abysmal brute," to which certain pugilists took exception until they came to realize the author's meaning—the life that refuses to quit and lie down even after consciousness has ceased.

“By '**abysmal brute**,' Jack would extemporize, ‘I mean the basic life deeper than the brain and the intellect in living things. Intelligence rests upon it; and when intelligence goes, it still remains. The abysmal brute life,’ he illustrated, ‘that causes the heart of a gutted dog-fish to beat in one's hand—you've seen them do that when we were fishing off the Key Route pier,’ I was reminded. ‘Or the beak of a slain turtle to close and bite off a man's finger; it's the life force that makes a fighter go on fighting even though he is past all direction from his intelligence.’ So enamored was he of his own phrase that eight years afterward he used it for title of another prize-fight novel.”

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Donald White:

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