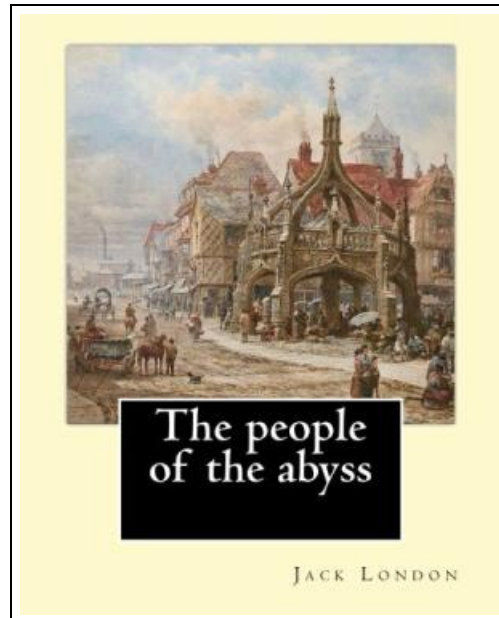


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The People of the Abyss (1903) is a book by Jack London about life in the East End of London in 1902. He wrote this first-hand account after living in the East End (including the Whitechapel District) for several months, sometimes staying in workhouses or sleeping on the streets. The conditions he experienced and wrote about were the same as those endured by an estimated 500,000 of the contemporary London poor. There had been several previous accounts of slum conditions in England, most notably *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1844 by Friedrich Engels. However, most of these were based on secondhand sources. Jack London's account was based on the firsthand experience of the writer, and proved to be more popular. Jacob Riis's sensational *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) has been suggested as a source of inspiration for *The People of the Abyss*. A contemporary advertisement for Jack London's book said that it tingles with the directness only possible from a man who knows London as Jacob Riis knows New York, suggesting that his publisher, at least, perceived a resemblance. When London wrote *The People of the Abyss*, the phrase the Abyss, with its hellish connotation, was in wide use to refer to the life of the urban poor. H. G. Wells's popular 1901 book, *Anticipations*, uses the expression in this sense some twenty-five times, and uses the phrase the People of the Abyss eight times. One writer, analyzing *The Iron Heel*, refers to the People of the Abyss as H. G. Wells phrase. George Orwell was inspired by *The People of the Abyss*, which he read in his teens, and in the 1930s he...



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