

THE HUMAN DRIFT

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The Human Drift by Jack London

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JACK LONDON

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HUMAN DRIFT**



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BY

JACK LONDON

Author of "The Call of the Wild," etc.

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THE HUMAN DRIFT

ONE

THE HUMAN DRIFT

"The Revelations of Devout and Learn'd
Who rose before us, and as Prophets Burn'd,
Are all but stories, which, awoke from Sleep,
They told their comrades, and to Sleep return'd."

THE history of civilisation is a history of wandering, sword in hand, in search of food. In the misty younger world we catch glimpses of phantom races, rising, slaying, finding food, building rude civilisations, decaying, falling under the swords of stronger hands, and passing utterly away. Man, like any other animal, has roved over the earth seeking what he might devour; and not romance and adventure, but the hunger-need, has urged him on his vast adventures. Whether a bankrupt gentleman sailing to colonise Virginia or a lean Cantonese contracting to labour on the sugar plantations of Hawaii, in each case, gentleman and coolie, it is

a desperate attempt to get something to eat, to get more to eat than he can get at home.

It has always been so, from the time of the first pre-human anthropoid crossing a mountain-divide in quest of better berry-bushes beyond, down to the latest Slovak, arriving on our shores to-day, to go to work in the coal-mines of Pennsylvania. These migratory movements of peoples have been called drifts, and the word is apposite. Unplanned, blind, automatic, spurred on by the pain of hunger, man has literally drifted his way around the planet. There have been drifts in the past, innumerable and forgotten, and so remote that no records have been left, or composed of such low-typed humans or pre-humans that they made no scratchings on stone or bone and left no monuments to show that they had been. These early drifts we conjecture and know must have occurred, just as we know that the first upright-walking brutes were descended from some kin of the quadrumana through having developed "a pair of great toes out of two opposable thumbs." Dominated by fear, and by their very fear accelerating their development, these early ancestors of ours, suffering hunger-pangs very like the ones we experience to-day, drifted on, hunting and being hunted, eating and being eaten, wan-

dering through thousand-year-long odysseys of screaming primordial savagery, until they left their skeletons in glacial gravels, some of them, and their bone-scratchings in cavemen's lairs.

There have been drifts from east to west and west to east, from north to south and back again, drifts that have criss-crossed one another, and drifts colliding and recoiling and caroming off in new directions. From Central Europe the Aryans have drifted into Asia, and from Central Asia the Turanians have drifted across Europe. Asia has thrown forth great waves of hungry humans from the prehistoric "round-barrow" "broad-heads" who overran Europe and penetrated to Scandinavia and England, down through the hordes of Attila and Tamerlane, to the present immigration of Chinese and Japanese that threatens America. The Phœnicians and the Greeks, with unremembered drifts behind them, colonised the Mediterranean. Rome was engulfed in the torrent of Germanic tribes drifting down from the north before a flood of drifting Asiatics. The Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, after having drifted whence no man knows, poured into Britain, and the English have carried this drift on around the world. Retreating before stronger breeds, hungry and voracious, the Eskimo has