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The Making of an American

Jacob A. Riis

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The Making of an American

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The Making of an American Jacob A. Riis

“He was interested from the start in small parks and playgrounds and in the suppression of the sweat-shop. His own career furnished the material for one of the best textbooks that has yet appeared on American life, ‘The Making of an American.’ If one wanted to give an open-minded foreigner a clear view of what lies behind the confused efforts and bewildering activities of this continent, so far as Americans control it, he could not do better than to put into his hands Franklin’s ‘Autobiography,’ Emerson’s ‘Essays,’ Lincoln’s ‘Speeches,’ ‘Riis’s ‘The Making of an American,’ Booker Washington’s ‘Up From Slavery,’ and Mary Antin’s ‘The Promised Land’….It is safe to say that no man has ever more vitally and faithfully expressed and interpreted the American spirit than Jacos Riis. He was a democrat in the true and noble sense of the word in every fiber of his being, a brother to all men, and especially to the unfortunate.” -New Outlook

“The secret of Riis’ hold on the people lies both in his unique personality and in what he has accomplished for society. A man supercharged with human love, and fighting successfully for better life among the people, is bound to be listened to. His story tells itself, and is all the stronger if he has worked out his own redemption before undertaking a quest for his brethren. Jacob Riis first conquered himself, and then went forth to conquer for the poor of New York. One must read at least two of his books to know Riis. ‘The Making of an American’ tells the first part of the story; the second part is told by ‘The Battle with the Slum’….Simplicity, directness, and spontaneity are the predominant characteristics of the literature produced by Riis in his battle for better living….He uses none of the artifices of the ordinary novelist. There is no holding over of the chinacteric for the purpose of chaining the reader’s interest; on the contrary, there is a rushing to tell all there is at hand to make room for the more interesting.” -Western Journal of Education

“Fairly bubbles over with happiness, energy, and inspiration….It is partly the pleasure of watching a desperate, thrilling contest against big odds, with success at the end, that gives this book its keen appeal.” -Boston Herald

“To say that the book is as interesting as a novel would be to belittle its powers of entertaining. Few novels could hold my attention as can this book. While it was running through ‘The Outlook’ a great many people imagined that it was more or less in the nature of fiction, but every word of it is true.” -Chicago Tribune

“One of the brightest, wholesomest, most fascinating books of the season.” -Record-Herald, Chicago

“It is not its relation to civic problems and social conditions that will give ‘The Making of an American’ its place in the world’s heart. It is its personal charm, its buoyancy and humor and tenderness, its romance and vivid incident, that makes this life-story of a simple American citizen as varied and delightful as any romance.” -Publishers Weekly

“‘The Making of an American’ is the story of a very extraordinary life, the record of obstacles, apparently insuperable, overcome by sheer brain and brawn….It is, moreover, a love story of a peculiarly intimate sort. For Mr. Riis won the girl he wanted, after all. Only a Dane, and a Dane who had come under the influence of that sweetest and simplest of characters, Hans Anderson, could have narrated a story of this sort.” -New York Herald

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