

# JACOB RIIS

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

IT is difficult for me to write of Jacob Riis only from the public standpoint. He was one of my truest and closest friends. I have ever prized the fact that once, in speaking of me, he said, "Since I met him he has been my brother." I have not only admired and respected him beyond measure, but I have loved him dearly, and I mourn him as if he were one of my own family.

But this has little to do with what I wish to say. Jacob Riis was one of those men who by his writings contributed most to raising the standard of unselfishness, of disinterestedness, of sane and kindly good citizenship, in this country. But in addition to this he was one of the few great writers for clean and decent living and for upright conduct who was also a great doer. He never wrote sentences which he did not in good faith try to act whenever he could find the opportunity for action. He was emphatically a "doer of the word," and not either a mere hearer or a mere preacher. Moreover, he was one of those good men whose goodness was free from the least taint of priggishness or self-righteousness. He had a white soul; but he had the keenest sympathy for his brethren

who stumbled and fell. He had the most flaming intensity of passion for righteousness, but he also had kindness and a most humorously human way of looking at life and a sense of companionship with his fellows. He did not come to this country until he was almost a young man; but if I were asked to name a fellow-man who came nearest to being the ideal American citizen, I should name Jacob Riis.

He is his own monument. His words and deeds will live after him. There is scant need for us to try to commemorate him; but there are certain things that can be done. One of them is to name the Rockaway Children's Park after him—the Jacob Riis Park. He fought for the weak, he fought against corruption in high places; but perhaps the fight that was closest to his heart was the fight for children. A child suffering physically, mentally, or morally aroused every instinct of chivalry and championship in his nature. He was ever battling for the welfare of the generation that was to come. We have a Rockaway Children's Park because of what he did. Let us name it for him, the staunchest, most efficient friend the children of New York City have ever had.