

The SMART SET

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The Raw Material—The stew in the American melting pot is by no means so diverse as critics of the smell would have us believe. Now and then a strange herb gets in, but not often. In the main the ingredients go unchanged from year to year, even from century to century.

The standard vegetable is and always has been a peasant in flight from his own inferiority. He leaped in, at the start, because the baron at home refused to credit and regard his theological inspirations; he came later because the baron stood against his political and economic innovations; he comes today for either reason, or both. Always he brings and has brought his high indignation against existing superiorities, accepted excellences. Always he has been filled with the passion to find elbow-room for his own lonesome superiority: his relative freedom from sin, his capacity for renouncing and doing without, his residual moral grandeur.

Whether he has been a Dutchman fleeing the Spanish hoof, or an Irishman fleeing the English, or a Jew fleeing the Russian, or an Armenian fleeing the Turkish, or a German fleeing the German—whether he has been a Scandinavian crazed by theological speculation under the cold arctic moon, or a Bohemian made frantic by the lingering wars of Hussite days, or a Russian *mouzhik* run amok by Tolstoian balderdash, or a Scot poisoned and palsied by Calvinism, or an Italian revolting suddenly against a steady diet of bad spaghetti and Mother Church—always he has brought in his conviction that his own heart is pure, that his own politics and theology are better than those of the baron, that the millennium would dawn with blinding flashes if the whole world would only become as virtuous as he is.

This is the Puritan idea; this is Puritanism. It will not die out in These States until the stream of fugitive innocents runs dry, until the delusion of moral perfection is lost and forgotten, until the slow process of evolution brings out of the muck an aristocracy purged of all contamination from below, and with new and genuine superiorities to oppose to those of plowhands and garment-workers, and with the resolution to safeguard and enforce them and the strategy necessary to the business. In brief, it will not die out for a thundering long while, alas, alas!