

The SMART SET

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As Europe Sees Us—Now and then there comes a hint that Europe, steeped in its carnalities, views the American scene with a somewhat bilious eye, but in the main the facts are not openly discussed. Here, as always, the newspapers reduce the thing to a glittering emission of meaningless phrases. The English owe us money; hence they are disposed to find fault with us. The Germans smart under their defeat; hence their invention of *Wilsonwort* as a term to designate a word of honour worth ten cents on the dollar. The French lament that they are no longer able to rob and debauch our infantry; hence they accuse us of robbing *them*. The Italians are enraged because we forbade their imperialistic immoralities. The Russians dislike us because they are the enemies of all humanity, and see in us a powerful instrument of the true, the good and the beautiful.

I often wonder how many Americans, even of the better-informed sort, realize what is under all this. Have they any genuine comprehension of the aspect that the Puritan commonwealth bears to European eyes—not filmy mob eyes, but eyes that see sharply and realistically? If so, then they must shiver a bit in meditative hours. What, indeed, could present a more astounding contrast than the Puritan democrat's view of himself and the civilized European's view of him? On the one hand there is the international Chevalier Bayard and good little boy of journalistic legend—the pattern and despair of all men of lesser races—the knight errant who roves the world doing good ardently, and taking no tip for it—the incomparable bagman, rich, prodigal and irresistible — the mathematically correct family man, devoid of all Teutonic hardness and Latin looseness—the chosen agent and confidant of God, eager for all good works, hot for order and decorum, and full of a peculiar and gorgeous rectitude—the champion of liberty, East, West, North and South—the humane host to the downtrodden of all lands—the enemy of aristocracy and privilege—the supreme masterpiece of a diligent and admiring Creator. And on the other hand—

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Well, on the other hand there is something quite different—something that had better be kept, perhaps, in its dark cage. I let in a few lights. They reveal a pushing, noisy, slimy, obnoxious fellow—a good Samaritan picking pockets—one whose word of honour is worth nothing in the world—a wholesale merchant of pecksniffery, chadbandry, all sorts of abhorrent hypocrisy—a poltroon looking for hamstringed enemies, easy conquests, facile stealings—a moral fanatic, eternally concerned with the doings of the other fellow—an oaf dead to beauty, and truth, and common decency—a worshipper of mountebanks and contemner of first-rate men—the ghastly end-product and *reductio ad absurdum* of mob ethics, mob aspirations, mob crazes, mob notions of what is nice—the creature who has made a quarter of the earth uninhabitable by civilized men.

All this last I gather from reliable secret agents in the decaying kingdoms and principalities of Europe. If I edit the report, it is downward. What is behind it, I fear, is a great surprise on some fatal day, maybe not far distant—a surprise as colossal as that which floored and flabbergasted the Prussian. The Prussian had his warning. The late Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche voiced it dismally in the ecstatic days following 1870. Fred was disregarded; nay, dismissed as an idiot. He died long before the band began to play. . . . I am surely not one to embrace his fate. I am no Nietzsche. But as a patriot so far uncaught with the goods, I may be permitted, I hope, to at least indulge myself in an admonitory cough.