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FIRST EDITORIAL

## THEY SOWED THE STORM, NOW REAP THE WHIRLWIND.

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**P**rofessor William Graham Sumner, of Yale, delivered in his city last Monday an impassioned, at times eloquent address against expansion. The title he chose for his discourse was catchy and appropriate: “The Conquest of the United States by Spain.” He spoke with fervor against “Imperialism” as an evil that threatened to engulf the nation, he argued against the dreaded calamity with all the intensity that deep apprehension for the dark future prompted his mind to. His closing words were:

There is a saying that “Americans can do anything.” Many are willing to run into a hole, trusting to luck and cleverness to get out. There are some things that Americans cannot do. Americans cannot make 2 plus 2 equal 5. You may answer that that is an arithmetical impossibility and is not in the range of our subject. Very well, Americans cannot collect \$2 a gallon tax on whiskey. They tried it through many years and failed. That is an economic and political impossibility, the roots of which are in human nature. Americans cannot govern a city of 100,000 inhabitants so as to get comfort and convenience in it at a low cost and without jobbery. The Fire Department of this city is now demoralized by political jobbery. Spain and all her possessions are not worth so much to you and me as the efficiency of the Fire Department of New Haven. The Americans in Connecticut cannot abolish the rotten borough system. Americans cannot reform the pension list. It is very doubtful, indeed, if Americans can keep up an army of 100,000 men in time of peace. Americans cannot assure the suffrage to negroes throughout the United States. Worse still—Americans cannot assure life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to negroes inside of the United States. When the negro Postmaster’s house was set on fire in the night in South Carolina, and not only he but his wife and children were murdered as they came out, and when, moreover, this incident passed without legal investigation or punishment, it was a bad omen for the extension of liberty to Malays and Tagals by simply setting over them the American flag. Upon a little serious examination, the off-hand disposal of an important question of policy by the declaration that “Americans can do anything” proves to be only a silly

piece of bombast. The laws of nature are just as valid for Americans as for anybody else, and if we commit acts we shall have to take consequences, just like other people.

The attitude of Prof. Sumner as depicted in this peroration is that of a man in despair at an approaching storm. To those who only now hear of him, his plight might inspire sympathy; to those acquainted with him through previous utterances his plight inspires justifiable delight: He helped to sow the storm and must now reap the whirlwind.

It is now about twelve years that Prof. Sumner has been delivering himself, off and on, on matters connected with the Social Question. Hardly one of these deliverances but helped lay the foundation upon which the present stupendous blunder of expansion is built, helped to sow the seed from which the present expansion flower is but a blossom.

The corner-stone of the present expansion dementia is quite well pointed out by Prof. Sumner, to wit, a notion that “Americans can do anything,” or that “America is entirely unlike any other country.” And this notion is one that Prof. Sumner helped to cultivate. Again and again, his arguments against Socialism had that notion for a “clincher”: unable to refute Socialism by reason, he regularly resorted to the clap-trap of “Americanism,” thus seeking to raise a bar against Socialism by tickling, inciting and encouraging a national superstition that now, unable to do the anti-Socialist work expected of it, is producing its legitimate fruit.

Well may Prof. Sumner and his like tremble at the dark clouds that are gathering on the horizon. In America, no more than elsewhere, do trees grow with their roots in the skies. “Americanism” is no hoodoo.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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