

The Cuban Question—Senator Sumner, the Old Man of the Sea.

The admirable letter of that famous old hero of a hundred fights, General James Watson Webb, which appeared in the *Tribune* of Tuesday, on the state of things in Cuba, cannot fail to produce an effect upon Congress and the country. It is written in excellent temper, impartial to all parties concerned, and, at the same time, has the true ring of American patriotism. General Webb has had great experience in important affairs during, as he says, the forty-two years of active public life, the thirty-four years he was editor in New York, the eight years he was Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Brazil, and in other prominent positions. He is like the war horse which immediately becomes inspired when active work is on hand or before him. The state of affairs in Cuba and the Cuban question was just the field for his ever active mind, and no one could be found, perhaps, more capable of investigating and writing on the subject. His letter cannot fail to convince any one—except Senator Sumner and Mr. Fish—of the strength, resources and determination of the Cuban patriots; of the frightful character of the war in Cuba; the merciless brutality of the Spaniards; the anarchical rule of the Spanish volunteers; the unprotected condition of American citizens in the island; the contempt for the American government; the miserable, weak and shortsighted policy of the administration at Washington, and the duty of this country in the matter. He has become a voluntary commissioner and diplomat at the right time, and, if we mistake not, his letter will produce a good effect in Washington.

The great obstacle to the recognition of the Cubans has been in Senator Sumner, that Old Man of the Sea, who has mercilessly endeavored to crush the Cuban patriots. This visionary theorist and heartless egotist has persistently misrepresented the condition of things, because, forsooth, he imagined the concession of belligerent rights to the insurgents would damage his sophomorical oration on the Alabama claims question and the ambitious hopes he had built upon that. He would sacrifice the cause of republican liberty in America and the principles of humanity, as well as national interests, for a hobby or from selfish motives. He has ever been impracticable and a marplot of evil. The terrible bloody civil war we recently passed through, with the enormous debt and all the other dreadful evils resulting from it, are to be attributed more to him than to any other public man. In direct opposition to well ascertained facts he asserted over and over again that there was no war in Cuba worthy of being so called, that the insurrection was played out, and that the patriot government of Cuba had not abolished slavery. It suited him to draw his information from the mendacious Spanish officials and from such false reports as have been continually sent from Havana by that agent of the Associated Press, who, as General Webb shows, has been the instrument and tool of the Spanish authorities. He would not listen to anything else because it has not suited his purpose to do so. Unfortunately, too, he has had absolute influence over our weak Secretary of State, and thus, indirectly, over the President and other members of the administration.

It will not be so easy for Mr. Sumner to deny the facts presented by General Webb. They have the impress of truth upon them. General Webb had an opportunity of getting facts on the spot, and even Senator Sumner will scarcely have the hardihood to question either the intelligence or statements of such a high authority. And what does General Webb say after giving details in corroboration of his assertions? "I hazard nothing," he declares, "in saying that had General Grant and Hamilton Fish been permitted to know the whole truth belligerent rights would have been conceded to the Cubans six months ago, in utter disregard of the arrogant and officious threats of Spain to consider such a proceeding on our part a *casus belli*." This may be properly called the summing up and verdict of General Webb on the facts which he has given in detail. It is and will be the verdict of the American people also. General Grant, we are sure, has been deceived. In the multiplicity of his duties he has been compelled to rely upon his Cabinet, and in this matter mainly upon Mr. Fish. Blind himself on this subject, he has been led by the wilfully blind men that surround him. But has not the time arrived when the President should open his eyes and follow the national will rather than Mr. Fish and Mr. Sumner? This Cuban question has assumed such a phase and such proportions now that it cannot be shirked any longer by the administration without irretrievable disgrace. If Mr. Fish and the rest of the Cabinet will not go with popular sentiment—will still be opposed to the honor and interests of the country in the matter of Cuba—the President should dismiss them at once and form a new Cabinet. As to a war with Spain through conceding belligerent rights to the Cubans, that is a bugbear. It would be no cause of war, and would not be recognized as such by the civilized world. If Spain should be foolish enough to venture upon such a course, let her do so. We could soon humble her pride and folly, and indemnify ourselves for the war. But it is positively humiliating to think that this mighty republic dare not do what it should from fear of war with a decrepit and third rate Power like Spain. Let us hope that Congress and the President will act together, and at once, in conceding belligerent rights to the Cubans. That will settle the question of Cuban independence, and the United States will see a troublesome matter pertaining to America removed forever from complications with European Powers.