

**Poem by Ernest Howard Crosby, “The Real ‘White Man’s Burden’,” (1899)**

From Ernest Howard Crosby, *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1902), pp. 33–34. Poem originally appeared in *New York Times* (February 15, 1899).

*Poet Ernest Crosby was an active anti-imperialist, poet, and social reformer who had experienced British imperialism first-hand in Egypt. After reading the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, he resigned from his position in Egypt as judge of the International Tribunal and devoted his life to promoting nonviolence. Crosby served as the president of the Anti-Imperialist League of New York and as vice president of the national Anti-Imperialist League. In 1899 he penned the parody poem below to answer Rudyard Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden.”*

THE REAL “WHITE MAN’S BURDEN” by Ernest Howard Crosby

Take up the White Man’s burden.  
Send forth your sturdy kin,  
And load them down with Bibles  
And cannon-balls and gin.  
Throw in a few diseases  
To spread the tropic climes  
For there the healthy niggers  
Are quite behind the times.  
And don’t forget the factories  
On those benighted shores  
They have no cheerful iron mills  
Nor eke<sup>1</sup> department stores.  
They never work twelve hours a day,  
And live in strange content  
Altho’ they never have to pay  
A single sou<sup>2</sup> of rent.

Take up the White Man’s Burden,  
And teach the Phillippines  
What interest and taxes are  
And what a mortgage means.  
Give them electrocution chairs,  
And prisons, too, galore,  
And if they seem inclined to kick  
Then spill their heathen gore.  
They need our labor question, too,  
And politics and fraud—  
We’ve made a pretty mess at home,  
Let’s make a mess abroad.  
And let us ever humbly pray  
The Lord of Hosts may deign  
To stir our feeble memories  
Lest we forget—the *Maine*.

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<sup>1</sup> Large

<sup>2</sup> Sou – a former coin and money of account of France

## Document Analysis

What does Crosby define as the worst aspects of U.S. imperialism?

Although Crosby's poem is a parody, it raised important issues of the day. Does the disagreement between Crosby and Kipling (and imperialists and anti-imperialists generally) sound familiar in the twenty-first century?

Why did Crosby mention the *Maine* at the end of the poem? What message was he attempting to convey?