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EDITORIAL

ANTIETAM AND GETTYSBURG.

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AT first, disappointment, speedily followed by a keen relish, awaits every one who takes up the little book of William E. Speare, entitled *The North and the South, at Antietam and Gettysburg*.

The title justifies the expectation that the work is a military treatise of the operations on the two great battlefields of the Civil War, and that the same is written in a popular style. The reader is speedily disappointed. The work, though it deals with military operations, is not militarily enlightening; it is, on that head, often clumsy. Fortunately, in even measure with the loss of interest the reader feels in what he expected to find, his interest increases in what he did not expect to find. The work is essentially an endeavor to prove the value of rank and file work. In this instance the point is illustrated with rough sketches of the battles of Gettysburg and Antietam.

At a time when our capitalist class is so completely at the end of its mission that it is fast throwing to the winds all its own one-time democratic traditions, is arrogating to itself God-given qualities, is claiming to be the source of all wealth and the God-inspired director of the God-forsaken masses, and is even getting ready to set up a monarchy—at such a season there is no little value in works like this of Mr. Speare's to bring out the useful, the necessary part that ranks and files play intelligently in great events. Mr. Speare's book does that well. It does it so well that even his swinging to the opposite extreme, and virtually denying the equally essential role of the central directing authority in the operations of large masses will not undo the good that the sound part of his work does.

So as to illustrate Mr. Speare's reasoning, we shall take the facts and arguments which he adduces in connection with Antietam, and especially with regard to the operations of the North. The points come out strongest there.

Into the basin of the Antietam there poured from three sides of the northern compass steady streams of soldiers. At almost each point the soldiers had to supplement the General's orders. The soldiers had to find the paths; they had to ascertain the morale of the rebels; they had to organize themselves on the spot for resistance; and when they reached the river it was their own momentum, conscious and unconscious, that drove their confluent streams resistlessly across the bridge to victory. All this is true; and well it is to bring it out. But all this is only a half truth.

True though it is that the glory does not wholly belong to the Generals, equally true it is that neither does it wholly belong to the individuals in the rank and file. The very facts adduced suggest at every turn the question, How came these streams of individuals to concentrate in that basin so as finally to do the irresistible pouring into the field where victory was won. That was the function of the Generals, of the central directing authority, which thereby imparted unity of general purpose to the very individuals, who, without the said central directing authority, instead of concentrating, would have scattered—instead of producing the harmony of victory, would have produced the disharmony of rout, like an orchestra without {its} orchestra director.

Sociology teaches that results are the product of two elements working cormbinedly—the central directing, and the collectivity. Capitalism denies the latter; Anarchism denies the former; Socialism recognizes both, and thereby harmonizes society.

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

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