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EDITORIAL

## FIGHTING OLD BATTLES AGAIN.

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**T**HE Sampson-Schley controversy is typical of “gentlemen” who have been educated to be “gentlemen,” and whose training fits them to move in society. It is also a reflex of the society in which they are fitted to move, a reflex of the other movers, and a reflex of the conditions that move them.

No one can for a moment doubt that material well-being is at the bottom of all the obscene and scurrilous talk in which the two have indulged. They have both applied the epithets coward, liar, runaway, etc. And why should the word of both not be taken? Both saw in the War with Spain an opportunity for cheap glory, and through that glory a chance to coin a few good, star spangled American dollars. Neither the one nor the other displayed any of the traits that go to make the great seaman. Neither figured in more than one battle. Neither has had that fine sense of decency that is characteristic of the great hero.

All this is well understood. A fact that accompanies it is not so well understood. That is the part played by the historian of contemporary events. Mr. Maclay, who wrote a naval history of the United States, is employed at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The commander of the yard is one of the staunchest supporters of Sampson. Maclay is classed as a laborer, but, in order to hold his job, he pretends occasionally to do clerical work. He receives thus enough to live on. He has very short hours, and is in this way enabled to write “history.”

But that history must be written from the standpoint of the living of the historian. He must do nothing to antagonize those that feed him. He must be like the old time harper and sing only the praises of the family under whose roof he resides. The enemy, that is the person under another roof, must come in for nothing but disparagement. The enemy must be vilified and held up to scorn and ridicule. Otherwise there is no room for the harper or the historian.

Maclay, accordingly, wrote his history so that Sampson should stand in the limelight and Schley in the shadow. He does not prove Schley to be a coward and a

traitor, a liar, and a caitiff, but he calls him these names, and reserves his terms of approbation for the man on whom he virtually depends for a living.

The Socialist can have no sympathy with the wranglers of the capitalist class. In this case the parties concerned make their living by war, that is, by premeditated, organized, scientific murder. They carry on their trade to advance the interest of capitalism. While carrying it on a circumstance may arise in which they have a dispute among themselves. One side may feel confident that a great wrong has been done, an outrage has been perpetrated, or that some one has been subjected to an injustice. Wrong, outrage and injustice mean, in this connection, that the aggrieved party has not had that full and unrestrained access to the good things of life that he personally believes himself entitled to. His wail might spend itself on the air if he did not control persons who were farther down the ladder than himself. When he can muster all these voices, when he can subsidize them in his own behalf, a formidable protest is raised. That is what Sampson has done, and what Schley has done.

Maclay is one of the persons who found it obligatory to yell with the Sampson crowd. He calls himself a historian, but in reality he is, as all capitalist historians must usually be, an apologist and a polemicist. His history is distortion. His narrative is an excuse for some man, or else it is an attack which has its foundation in an attempt to defend some other man.

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

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