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**An Eyewitness to the Battles of the Civil War  
Provides a Unique Perspective on America's Great Conflict**

## THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY CAMPAIGNS

*The Life of a Non-Combatant While Between the Lines in  
Virginia During the Civil War*

by **Thomas A. Ashby**

**THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY CAMPAIGNS** takes the unconventional approach of following the events of the Civil War, not by presenting a chronological series of outcomes across a theater of war, but rather by relating events from a fixed perspective, that of a family living in a particular town. Thomas A. Ashby was indeed a capable eyewitness to the facts, his book is a story seen through the eyes of a boy, who gives observations and communicates experiences that are not usually recounted by historians. The incidents connected with the story are located almost entirely in the Valley of Virginia, a picturesque region that was an important theater of military operations during the four years of strife, and that suffered as much from the effects of the war as any section of the South. One can perceive, in human terms, the wide-ranging effects of conflict as the war unfolded, the economic and social consequences and, perhaps even more importantly, the impact on attitudes and beliefs.

Ashby was an educated, cosmopolitan man, with a wide knowledge of affairs, as can be seen in comments about both America and beyond. Being conscientious, he attempts in his book to be accurate in his descriptions, as well as fair and just in his opinions and criticisms. Although Ashby takes a larger, objective perspective on important matters, he is candid and confident in his speech. Indeed, it is evident that he is even-handed and even scholarly in many areas, delivering a comprehensive but precise story, without resorting to needless rhetoric—political, patriotic, or otherwise. The demanding circumstances, the tests, misery and impoverishment of the people who remained at home and who were non-combatants are presented with openness and honesty.

In the book, Ashby gives a very good outline of the political and social activities in relation to the Presidential election of 1860, the Secession movement, and the onset of war. Moreover, he examines more obscure issues, such as the motivations that drove blacks to enlist in the Northern army. But it is in the psychological realm that Ashby puts forth the most interesting analyses, such as when he describes the demoralizing impact that resulted from the Federal army's generally cruel and despotic actions towards the ordinary people of the South. Paradoxically, the people were heartened to an extent by the more fair and beneficent treatment they received by certain Northern officers. However, Ashby's own emotions come through in the text, and he is more profoundly reflective, even melancholy, about the failings of his own people. He states that even near the beginning of the war, there were widespread beliefs that the Confederate govern-

ment was weak and inefficient, issuing far too much credit and allowing bogus currency to flourish. In reality, trade and commerce dwindled, and by the end of the war, eighty percent of personal property had been “swept away”.

Although he is saddened by the huge economic, social and cultural devastation brought about by years of war, Ashby is ultimately unrepentant in his support of secession. However, he does acknowledge that he and many others personally considered slavery to be morally wrong, separating this from the larger issue of the right of self-determination. Ashby even makes the remarkable claim, that if the “doorway” for gradual emancipation could somehow have been established in their Southern culture, the slaveowners could then have expressed their own hidden discomfort and anxiety over the enormous responsibility they had to shoulder in caring for those blacks who worked for them on their estates. **THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY CAMPAIGNS** is a remarkable work about a vastly tumultuous and historically critical period, one that must be studied at a new level of attention, that of the individual viewpoint.

Paul Dennis Sporer (editor) is the author of *The Dimensions of Companionship; Liberating Love; The Concept of Family*; and *Equal but Different*. He has also served as editor on more than 30 culturally and historically significant books, including *Painting Explained*, by Thomas Gullick; *Is Secession Treason?*, by Albert Bledsoe; *The Heart of Aryavarta*, by Lawrence Dundas; *Beauty and Art*; by Aldam Heaton; *The French at Home*, by Albert Rhodes; *From Slave Cabin to Pulpit*, by Peter Randolph; *Newer Ideals of Peace*, by Jane Addams; *Views of Old Europe*, by Bayard Taylor; *Gentle Measures*, by Jacob Abbott; *Parental Influences*, William Bacon; *Finding a Way Out*, by Robert Moton; *The New Birth*, by Austin Phelps; *Tupelo*, by John Hill Aughey; *An Incident of Travel*, Arthur Jerome Eddy; *End of an Era*, by John Sergeant Wise; *The Missionary*, by Samuel Mazzuchelli; *Half a Century*, by Jane Swisshelm; *Born Three Times*, by Thomas L. Johnson; *Dark Hollow*, by Anna Katharine Green; and *1492: Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, by Mary Johnston.

For further information about **THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY CAMPAIGNS**, or to arrange an interview with the editor, please contact Cassandra Foxton, [inform at anzapublishing.com](mailto:inform@anzapublishing.com). The publisher’s website address is AnzaPublishing.com.

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