

WILLIAM WALKER, MAN OF  
CONTROVERSY

MEMOIR

CATHERINE PAYNE HOLMAN

WILLIAM WALKER, MAN OF CONTROVERSY

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An Abstract  
Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Catherine Payne Holman  
August 1968

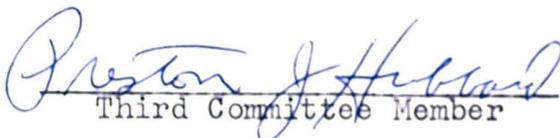
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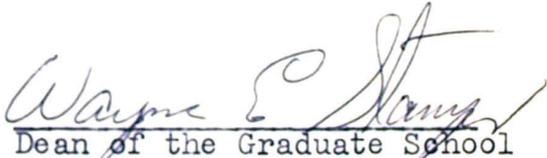
  
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## ABSTRACT

The checkered career of William Walker has long been a subject of controversy. Various historians have shown him as a dictator, a conquistador, a filibuster deluxe and have made lengthy studies of his military and political life. Little attention has been given to William Walker as a person. He remains the enigma today that he was in 1850 when viewed from the angle of his personality.

The mid-nineteenth century was an era in which the United States expanded physically from ocean to ocean and one in which a restless, mobile population sought adventure at home and abroad. The lure of Eldorado was a clarion call to young and old alike and the westward surge of humanity was a giant wave engulfing the entire nation.

Caught up in the transience of the times was William Walker, "the grey-eyed man of destiny." Born in Nashville, Tennessee in the year 1824, the youthful Walker had opposed his family in the choice of a career. The original plan for entrance into the ministry had been supplanted by study in the field of medicine. Finding this profession not to his liking, Walker then turned briefly to law and later to journalism. In his three professions the young man had traversed a large portion of the United States, as well as finding time for study in several European capitals. A cosmopolitan outlook, coupled with a

restless ambitious disposition, caused him to turn his attentions to Central America.

An abortive attempt at the conquest of Sonora in 1853 was a mere prelude to his most notable endeavor. In 1855 William Walker and his fifty-seven Immortals set foot on the soil of Nicaragua and for the next five years occupied the center position in that war-torn country. Ravaged by war and revolution almost constantly since its independence, Nicaragua was virtually depleted of manpower, capital and resources. Through a series of daring maneuvers, William Walker briefly extinguished the flames of civil war and made himself the key figure in that country.

Caught in the middle, Walker became a pawn on the chessboard of international and economic intrigue. The contest for control of Central America had evolved in a power struggle between Britain and the United States. More than this, pro-slavery and abolitionist groups within the United States vied for influence with telling effect on the fortunes of Walker. The giant nut-cracker which eventually crushed "the grey-eyed man of destiny," however, was the battle of financial titans over the vital Transit route across the country. Vanderbilt and Garrison in their economic vendetta brought Walker's actual downfall and eventual death before a Honduran firing squad on September 12, 1860.

The personality of William Walker has been lost in the studies of William Walker, the military and political figure. In analyzing the man himself, his hopes, his lofty ambitions, and his dreams, history is faced with a riddle of the proportion of the Sphinx. The evaluation of the man who was front-page news in the 1850's and who gained his brief page in history is a subject which deserves careful study and analysis.

The point in question is William Walker's purpose in his attempt to take control of the government of Nicaragua. He has been characterized and compared with every dictator and conqueror from Caesar onward. The thesis of this paper is that William Walker, after years of indecision and frustration, found that which he had so long sought in Nicaragua. He became a true patriot of that country. If his ideals were too high and the methods he used in enacting them unorthodox, they did not stem from lack of love for his adopted homeland, but rather from the fact that he was a politically uninitiated novice in the field of government and from his inability to judge and evaluate the people he governed. That he remained a true son of Nicaragua until the last is the central theme of this paper.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express sincere gratitude to Dr. J. Milton Henry, Professor of History, Austin Peay State University, for his counseling and guidance in exploration of this subject, as well as for his constructive criticism which proved so valuable, and also to Dr. Wentworth E. Morris and to Dr. Preston J. Hubbard who expended time and effort in the final analysis of the manuscript. In addition, Dr. William H. Ellis has been of great assistance in dealing with problems involving the writing of the manuscript itself.

The author wishes to thank her daughter, Carol H. Smyth, for making available much valuable material found in the Latin American collection at the University of Florida and for other assistance. Also appreciation is expressed to Dr. Jeanne P. Lafferty, the author's sister, who assisted in research in various libraries in the San Francisco area, which aided in evaluating the California era in the life of William Walker. The author also is appreciative of the many small gestures of help from her mother, Mrs. Allison W. Payne. Further thanks are expressed to Mrs. Linda Deason and Mrs. Aileen H. Adams for their patience and understanding in helping with proof-reading and mechanics.

To both the libraries of Austin Peay State University and the Joint University Library at Nashville, as well as the Library and Archives of the State of Tennessee, the author expresses sincere gratitude.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

William Walker, filibuster deluxe, has been the subject of several biographies, most of which are concerned chiefly with his military successes and failures. Little effort has been made to assess the characteristics or to evaluate the personality of the man himself. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the factors in William Walker's heredity, environment and personal life that led him to the peak of success and then to the dismal failure that ended with a firing squad.

Emphasis will be given first to Walker's family background and environment. Such points as socio-economic status of the family, personality of the group, early education and religious influences will be delved into for the purpose of understanding those influences on William Walker, the man.

Also to be considered are the times themselves, the popularity and general acceptance of issues vital and current which are not in vogue today, but had influence in shaping the thoughts and ideas of that generation. Especial importance will be given to the idea of Manifest Destiny, as an outgrowth of nationalistic feeling.

The life of William Walker breaks into distinct

parts. Following his early youth came a brief span of indecision which, during the second phase of his life, was intertwined with his years of education and preparation for professional life. Strong passions were then aroused in the young man, and he ran the gamut of emotional experiences. Love, eternal friendship, hate, prejudice, rejection, disillusion and death were all influences experienced by William Walker during a period of less than a decade.

How the previous experiences culminated in Walker's grandiose schemes and dreams in attempting to establish an empire, first in Sonora and later in Central America, will be given attention, as well as the roster of the illustrious and near illustrious who followed him on his ill-fated venture. No attempt will be made to discuss the military successes and failures, or any factual accounts of political occurrences except as these may explain or illustrate the personality of Walker himself. This third and final period of Walker's short life of thirty-seven years will conclude this study.

That William Walker was an important and colorful figure in his own era is not to be denied. That he was receptive to the nationalistic feelings current in the mid 1800's also is accepted. That the issue of slavery and its expansion may have been a motive of the man in his

attempts at conquest is not of major importance in this study. It is the assumption of this study that William Walker would have been motivated to some similar type of action or activity regardless of the age in which he found himself, that he was not merely a creature of his time, a man of the hour, but a distinct personality who would have had his page in history simply because he was William Walker, which assumption will be substantiated in this study.

In dealing with this study, primary sources have been used whenever possible. William Walker's own book has been given careful attention, though much of it is of little use in a personality study, for he is often concerned chiefly with military and political problems. Microfilms of newspapers of the mid-nineteenth century have been studied in an effort to see the man as the American of that era saw him. The writings of contemporaries have been given attention in this study, as have periodicals.

In the study of literature related to this topic, W. O. Scroggs is the recognized authority, and his studies are meticulous and detailed as to Walker's actual accomplishments, his motives, his eventual plans and purposes, as well as his successes and failures. This historian's final evaluation is that Walker, the man, was not big enough to achieve the hopes of Walker, the dreamer, that

he failed to put an end to the political unrest of Nicaragua and to establish a stable and productive form of government.

James Jeffrey Roche, in his By-Ways of War, traces the history of filibustering through the accounts of several filibusters, giving prominence to Walker, and concluding that ambition and a firm belief in his destiny caused failure and death.

Laurence Greene, in his study, The Filibuster, set out to prove that Walker was ill-fitted for the role he had assumed and that he was consumed "with a dictator's mania," though he further characterizes him as an idealist and a reformer. From the beginning, he attempts to discredit and defame, yet at times is forced to grudging admiration. A summation of his study is that Walker was imbued with a lust for power.

William V. Wells, Consul General of Honduras during this era, in his book, Walker's Expedition to Nicaragua, published in 1856, lauded the attempt and the aims of the man, and strongly defended his position there. He referred to Walker several times as a "Liberator of Central America."

No more diverse or opposite viewpoints in evaluating the career of William Walker can be found anywhere than those penned by two men who served with him in the Nicaraguan venture. C. W. Doubleday, in his Reminiscences

of the "Filibuster" War in Nicaragua, is arch critic and complainant, finding Walker militarily ignorant and unprepossessing in manner and appearance. His accusation of insatiable ambition and achievement of personal and absolute power contrasts strangely with the picture painted by James Carson Jamison in his book, With Walker in Nicaragua. The latter saw him as a man of idealism, with a stern conscience and a high sense of dedication and honor. He decried all those who characterized Walker as an ambitious Caesar bent on taking advantage of a weak people to gain despotic power. He felt Walker was a true crusader for democracy, desiring to bring reforms to the country of his choice, along with the blessings of peace and stability of government. Doubleday, while professing a warm personal attachment for Walker, often exhibited qualities both petty and petulant. If Walker failed to respond to his words of advice, Doubleday sulked and once even withdrew from the command, though he later returned to resume his position in the Falange.

The position Walker held in political circles of the day is of importance in understanding certain decisive acts which he put into effect as head of the Nicaraguan government. The Congressional Globe of 1856 through 1858 throws light on these decisions and gives a perspective of the turbulence of the times. These volumes also place the

Nicaraguan situation in focus as only one piece of the giant puzzle of national and international politics. The character of Walker as **seen** by important political figures of his day, both supporters and opponents, is given further dimension when viewed from a political angle.

The latest biography on Walker is Albert Z. Carr's, The World and William Walker, published in 1963, which is almost Freudian in its analysis and evaluation. The puritanical upbringing with its denied sex impulses caused Walker to be impulsive and explosive and tended toward the "profession of heroism." Since he must excel in something, his military career gave him a chance at domination, which his sex-starved nature craved and demanded.

The thesis of this paper is that William Walker, at first a mere adventurer, became almost from his initial entry into Nicaragua, a patriot and a true citizen of that country. All his efforts were directed toward the resurrection and rebirth of this land after its long period of devastation and destruction. His ambitions, his hopes, his dreams, his ideals were all enlisted in the cause to which he dedicated his life. Greater love hath no man than that he lay down his life, and this William Walker did for his adopted homeland.

In this study, Chapter II deals with Walker's parentage and early life. Chapter III will give attention

to Walker's higher education, both in the United States and in Europe. Also related will be the emotional experiences of the young man which had such shattering impact on him. Chapter IV describes Walker's sojourn in California, by which time he had become a man. His physical characteristics are detailed as seen by contemporaries. Chapter V briefly attempts to recount the growth and development of qualities of leadership, as exemplified in the abortive attempt to conquer Sonora, which was a prelude to involvement in the fortunes of war-torn Nicaragua. His followers are also characterized, and a cross-section of men who followed Walker is included, in an attempt to picture the diversity of types included in his army. Chapter VI depicts Walker, the General of his army, in Nicaragua, as well as Nicaraguan life, both for civilian and soldier. Chapter VII attempts to prove the thesis of the paper, that Walker had at last found that for which he had so long sought, and that from that time onward he gave a full measure of devotion to his adopted homeland.

It is not the purpose of this paper to make a deliberate attempt to eulogize Walker, or, on the other hand, to condemn him for his actions. These points his contemporaries emphasized in one vein or the other in all previous studies. The major area of exploration herein examined is the study of the man himself and the motives

that prompted him to the actions he took in his brief career in Nicaragua.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY LIFE

William Walker is an enigma even to his biographers. There is only incidental agreement on the effect of the varied forces of heredity or environment in shaping the personality of this colorful and flamboyant individual.

James Walker, a banker whose abode was a town near Glasgow, Scotland, came to Nashville in the year 1820. James was no itinerant; he fell heir to fairly extensive property in Nashville left him by an uncle, a Mr. Tate. There is no evidence that the elder Walker had ever set foot in the United States prior to this time, even for a cursory visit, but evidently he found a congenial atmosphere in the southern town, for shortly after this, Mr. Walker engaged in a mercantile business, owning a store on the Public Square in Nashville, the center of business activity.<sup>1</sup> Of his business acumen little is known, but it is obvious that he must have prospered, for he was accepted into the more affluent social circle and married Mary Norvell, a Kentuckian and a member of a pioneer family. Mary Norvell Walker was the daughter of Lieutenant Lipscomb

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<sup>1</sup>Jane Thomas, Old Days in Nashville (Copyright page missing: 1895), pp. 78-79.

Norvell, a Revolutionary War hero in Washington's army, and her mother was Martha Hendricks, whose family had gained prominence as Kentucky pioneers.<sup>2</sup>

By 1827, the Walkers were housed in a substantial brick home in Nashville, located on the northeast corner of Commerce Street and Fourth Avenue.<sup>3</sup> By this time, James Walker was president of a local concern known as the Commercial Insurance Company and was described as a prominent businessman. Four children were born to the Walkers; the eldest, William, was born on May 8, 1824, and Norvell, James and Alice followed in that order.<sup>4</sup>

Almost from the moment of his birth, William Walker became an object of curiosity. That he was physically small is not disputed, for as an adult he was hardly more than five feet and a half, and his weight little over one hundred pounds. As a child, his diminutive size caused him to be termed a "sissy" and a "milksop," his contemporaries having nicknamed him "Honey" and "Missy."<sup>5</sup> How William

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<sup>2</sup>Merritt Parmallee Allen, William Walker, Filibuster (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Nashville Banner, September 14, 1937.

<sup>4</sup>William A. Scroggs, Filibusters and Financiers, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1916), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup>Allen, op. cit., p. 7.

responded to these taunts is a matter of speculation. Carr suggests that he was bullied by older and larger boys and developed a fighting spirit in retaliation, while W. O. Scroggs feels that he was effeminate and tied to the maternal apron strings.<sup>6</sup> Certainly William was not athletic, but it is not to be thought that he did not engage in playing games and in developing himself physically, for only a physique so trained would have been able to endure the hardships and rigors of the military life he was later to lead.

In Allen's account of his early days, "he never got into scrapes, never disobeyed his parents, never did anything but read and study" and further that he "took pride in high marks at school and whenever he made an error, he broke down and cried."<sup>7</sup> It is felt that this virtuous interpretation is not wholly in character, for while the boy assuredly excelled in academic work, he is described by Scroggs as a reluctant scholar who found the schoolroom

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<sup>6</sup>Lawrence Green in The Filibuster quotes Jane H. Thomas as saying "He was as refined in his feelings as a girl," but this quote was not found in her book. Further, Miss Thomas was past ninety when she wrote her memoirs and many statements in her book cannot be verified by any source and are subject to question.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

galling to his restless nature.<sup>8</sup> William perhaps was avid to learn those things which were of interest to him but impatient with routine and dullness. Certainly he was highly intelligent, but was not considered a prig as he would have been had he done nothing but be a model boy.

Much emphasis has been given to the fact that Walker read to his invalid mother in an effort to entertain her. This is not really the unmanly procedure it would appear today; many fathers read to wife and children in the evenings as a part of the daily family "togetherness" of that day and age. If Walker deigned to spend a part of his mornings in this manner it brought only plaudits as a dutiful son and did not necessarily label him as a recluse. Carr feels that he possibly read Sir Walter Scott's medieval romances to his mother and refers to the Mark Twain witticism that the literate and the prosperous had "Sir Walter's disease."<sup>9</sup> He suggests further readings may have included Malory's Arthurian legends, which may have shaped the dreams of a young lad, too small physically and too advanced intellectually.<sup>10</sup> The fantasies of Ivanhoe and Galahad

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<sup>8</sup>Scroggs, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>9</sup>Albert Z. Carr, The World and William Walker (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

may have nourished ideals that would reach full flower only years later in the death of the dragon at Granada.

Young William adored his mother. In his idealization of her, his own pattern of conduct toward women in general was established. With his other parent, one feels friction was obvious almost from the beginning. The elder Walker, steeped in Knox and Calvin, and desirous of a profession for his first-born, had decided on the ministry as the chosen field for William. The austere and pious authority of the father was met with a tenacious rebellion on the part of the son, and continued resistance met with success on the young man's part, for he was allowed to pursue the career of medicine. James J. Roche feels that the father's choice was well chosen, for "the gravity of the kirk always pervaded his manner, and theological speculations interested him all his life."<sup>11</sup> Joaquin Miller, who idealized him and was his most articulate press agent says "His dress, language and bearing were those of a clergyman when not on the firing line."<sup>12</sup> It is possible that the father did "protest too much" and the youth, in

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<sup>11</sup>James Jeffrey Roche, By-Ways of War, (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1901), p. 56.

<sup>12</sup>Joaquin Miller, "That Night in Nicaragua," (Sunset Magazine XVI, April, 1906), p. 564.

his open rebellion threw away his real vocation. Carr, in his study of Walker, says "His challenges were invariably at the men who issued orders, men more powerful than himself. It had been Judge Parsons; now it was Munoz; soon it would be Vanderbilt. It had once been his father."<sup>13</sup> It was a battle of Scot against Scot, and the young man had won the opening round. In later life, Walker made little mention of his family, but in an oblique way, did refer to his father in the following passage: "We may often judge best of events by seeing clearly the origin of them. The father ceases to have any direct influence over either the mind or the organization of the child after the moment of conception; and yet how often we trace not merely the features of the father, but even the delicate traits of his character in his offspring."<sup>14</sup>

Religious life was a natural part of Walker's youth. At the time of his birth, the Disciples of Christ were practically unknown as an organized sect, but were to draw many converts to their cause in the next few decades. The name Norvell was prominent in the movement and the Walkers were also members of this stern sect. William was

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<sup>13</sup>Carr, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>14</sup>William Walker, The War in Nicaragua, (Mobile, Alabama, S. H. Goetzel and Co., 1860), p. 33.

not an active member of the church before graduation from college at age sixteen. In his later writings he often referred to his faith, and he was accused of being as rigidly puritanical as Cromwell. If this were true, not only active church participation but also the influences of the University of Nashville must be held responsible.<sup>15</sup>

William Walker was ready for higher learning at age twelve, having been called an exceptional student before he reached the age of ten. The curriculum he mastered here was incredible; it included Latin and Greek, in both of which William was fluent, mathematics of several varieties, surveying, navigation, chemistry, mineralogy, geology, logic, history, philosophy, political economy, international and constitutional law, composition, criticism and oratory. Nor was religious life neglected, for the college was almost monastic in its discipline.<sup>16</sup> Allen states that studies began at sunrise and continued until breakfast, which was a light meal sandwiched between two prayers. Classes followed with lunch and two additional prayers, and dinner followed the same pattern. Chapel was then held, with moral discussions following this. Luxuries did not exist there;

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<sup>15</sup>History and True Position of the Church of Christ in Nashville (Nashville, 1854), pp. 1-48.

<sup>16</sup>Carr, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

theatre and dances were forbidden, as well as horse races and cockfights. No student was permitted to study music, but William somehow gained a special permission and did study music at his own expense and without his father's consent. He also included fencing lessons in his curriculum and was an adept pupil. In the year 1838, when Walker was fourteen, he was graduated summa cum laude, in a class of twenty young men.<sup>17</sup> Conditions were slow to change at the University of Nashville, for when Walker delivered an address to the alumni society on October 3, 1848, an appendix to his written speech, attached by the school, stated: "Nothing has been found so detrimental to character and scholarship as a free indulgence in the use of money. More than is sufficient to defray necessary expenses, exposes the student to numerous temptations and adds nothing to his happiness and respectability."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Allen, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>18</sup>William Walker, "The Unity of Art," Appendix 31, (Nashville, Tennessee, A. Nolan, Pub. 1848).

## CHAPTER III

### THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Rather at loose ends for a few months, William studied medicine in Nashville in the office of a Dr. Jennings. Carr suggests that his choice of the medical profession as a career possibly was influenced by his intense feelings for his invalid mother.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of his reasons, he entered the School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in 1839. A classmate of Dr. Elisha Kent Kane, the Arctic explorer, these two young men of venturesome natures graduated in 1843.<sup>2</sup> His doctoral dissertation dealt with the iris, which was in a sense prophetic when later applied to "the grey-eyed man of destiny."<sup>3</sup>

Walker at graduation was nineteen years of age, and was not yet ready to engage in his chosen profession. He was to spend two years studying medicine in the various universities of Europe and, with his facility for languages,

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Z. Carr, The World and William Walker, (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>James Jeffrey Roche, By-Ways of War, (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1901), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>Carr, op. cit., p. 10.

attended lectures at the Paris school of medicine, as well as Heidelberg, Edinburgh, London, and also in Italy.<sup>4</sup> Carr states that his sojourn in Paris netted him little new medical knowledge, but did help him cultivate a taste for French literature, especially the novels of Victor Hugo, as well as the acquisition of polished continental manners, which most Americans deemed "sissified." In addition, he learned dueling as an art and fought with a two-edged sword. The fact that he came out of these duels unscathed was no mean feat for an American novice. Another influence was the development of a definite anti-British feeling in the young man, which antipathy he never lost and which was later to color his dealings with the British in Latin America.<sup>5</sup>

The return of Walker to the United States at age twenty-one did not result in any practical application of the skills learned in Europe to a profession. He did, for a very brief time, practice medicine in both Philadelphia and Nashville, but it is obvious that he found no real satisfaction in his work. Carr suggests that on his return to Nashville, he found his mother dying and, finding that

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<sup>4</sup>Roche, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

<sup>5</sup>Carr, op. cit., p. 11.

his skills were of no use to her, the practice of medicine seemed futile.<sup>6</sup> Roche, on the other hand, states that he found "the profession unsuited to his health."<sup>7</sup> Whatever the reason, he did leave the medical profession forever, and it is also evident that the breach between father and son became an irreparable gap during these months. The business minded father had no desire to continue financial support to a son so irresolute in decision regarding an occupation. At any rate, William Walker began the study of law in Nashville, later moving to New Orleans where the Code Napoleon formed the basis of legal studies.<sup>8</sup>

Walker was not unacquainted with the city of New Orleans and it is possible that he had a wide circle of acquaintances and perhaps even a friend or two there. Wells says that Walker had made an extended visit to New Orleans prior to entering the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, these were the years of the spas, and the Tennessee watering places were favored by the Louisiana elite as a retreat from the humid, fever ridden summers of

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Roche, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>8</sup>Carr, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>William V. Wells, Walker's Expedition to Nicaragua (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1856), pp. 19-21.

the bayou country.<sup>10</sup> Nashville newspapers of the day were filled with advertisements from these spas, and such places as Kingston's Springs, Tyree's Springs, Red Sulphur Springs, and Bailey's Springs each eulogized their varied comforts and benefits.<sup>11</sup>

Thus in 1846, William Walker made his way to the cosmopolitan city of New Orleans for the ostensible purpose of studying law. Carr suggests that his finances were very meager and that Walker found living on his earnings quite a problem. As a lawyer, Walker's personality posed a problem, and he was less than a success. Never at ease with strangers, he often was silent and enigmatic with clients and his courtroom manner was not decisive or confident. Sometime during this period he met and made the only friend of his life. Edmund Randolph was the exact opposite of William Walker in almost every respect. A descendant of George Washington, handsome, personable, and moving in the socially elite circles, he nevertheless formed a law partnership with Walker, a dour Scot, small in stature, unimpressive in appearance, attired without regard to

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<sup>10</sup>Merritt Parmallee Allen, William Walker, Filibuster, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), pp. 11-12.

<sup>11</sup>Nashville Republican Banner, (Nashville, Tennessee: Selected Issues, 1852-60).

fashion and little impressed by society.<sup>12</sup> Incongruous as the friendship may have seemed, it lasted a lifetime.

William Walker wrote:

The friendship between Randolph, Crittenden and Walker was of a character not to be expressed by words; but the existence of such a sentiment between these three is essential for an understanding of the perfect confidence which marked their acts in reference to the Transit. And to the noblest qualities of the heart, Randolph and Crittenden added the loftiest attributes of the intellect. To those who have heard the former at the bar, it will not be deemed the voice of friendship alone speaking, when it is said that his legal talents are such as would adorn courts when learning, and logic, and eloquence were more appropriate to the profession than they appear to be in these latter days.<sup>13</sup>

(It is obvious here that Walker included Crittenden, his friend's friend, in the triumvirate, only for immediate purposes.) This David-Johnathan relationship had a sad epilogue, for Randolph's insistence on the economic war with Vanderbilt led the idealistic, naive Walker to certain defeat and death.

The urbane Randolph often took his friend along to festive social affairs; whether the latter went willingly or not is a matter of conjecture. At one such occasion, Walker was introduced to a charming intelligent young woman, Ellen Galt Martin. Most historians have

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<sup>12</sup>Carr, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>13</sup>William Walker, War in Nicaragua, (Mobile, Alabama: S. H. Goetzel and Company, 1860), p. 150.

persistently referred to her as Helen Martin, but Carr's research on this point has proven beyond a doubt that her name was Ellen.<sup>14</sup> Roche felt Walker had met Miss Martin in Nashville after his return from Europe; however, a love affair between the two certainly flourished and grew in New Orleans.<sup>15</sup> (Thomas says "she did not reciprocate his love"<sup>16</sup> but this has not been substantiated. Furthermore, this source has been found in error very often.)

Ellen Martin, Alabama-born, had all the desirable attributes of the southern belle. Twenty-three, socially prominent, accomplished and genteel, only one thing was lacking for perfect womanhood: Ellen Martin was mute. Scarlet fever at the age of five had destroyed her hearing and her ability to speak.<sup>17</sup> For William Walker this proved no real deterrent; his facility for languages now stood him in good stead and he easily mastered the sign language that Miss Martin had studied in Philadelphia and he learned

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<sup>14</sup>Carr, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>15</sup>Roche, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

<sup>16</sup>Jane Thomas, Old Days in Nashville, (copyright page missing: 1895), pp. 78-79.

<sup>17</sup>Carr, op. cit., p. 6.

to communicate fluently with her.<sup>18</sup>

As their love grew and plans for marriage became a certainty,<sup>19</sup> Walker realized the inadequacy of the legal profession as a personal method of earning a living. By March of 1848, Walker and Randolph had dissolved their law partnership, with Randolph going West to the recently acquired territory of California and Walker, having found no real interest in law, moving into the field of journalism. A. H. Hayes and J. C. McClure had recently bought the New Orleans Crescent and were searching for a foreign editor to interpret the news from abroad, and Walker was the obvious choice for such a position. The Crescent was very successful and circulation soared. On the staff with Walker was Walt Whitman who had a column of his own. Walker himself was preoccupied with the crucial political issues of the day. The year 1848 was the year of revolutions and Kossuth, Louis Phillipe, the starving Irish and the Taiping Rebellion were all grist for the mill of the young editor. His ideas were very liberal, and his tone was definitely pro-French and anti-British. He took to wearing a Kossuth hat, often quoted Lord Byron, and felt, along with the rest

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<sup>18</sup>William A. Scoggs, Filibusters and Financiers, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1916), p. 14.

<sup>19</sup>Allen, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

of the United States, that by some hook or crook Cuba should become a part of this nation. His tone regarding the slave issue was neither pro-slave nor abolitionist, but his theory of Manifest Destiny was emphatic. The up-and-coming young editor left his mark all over the paper.<sup>20</sup>

The Nashville Republican Banner of late 1848, and during the early months of 1849, faithfully reported, as did most newspapers in the country, the yellow fever scourge prevalent in the southern United States. Accounts of the ravages in New Orleans received especial attention, for that city was badly hit. At first deaths were recorded by listing the names of the victims, but as the death rate increased, only statistics were posted. The death of Ellen Martin in April of 1849 was one of these statistics, and whether it was pneumonia, as Carr has insisted,<sup>21</sup> or from the fever itself, is immaterial. The effect on William Walker was the same: he was shattered. A tiny jeweled cross which he wore until his death was the sole visible reminder of his love but the inner marks remained.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Carr, op. cit., pp. 13-25.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>22</sup>Allen, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

A dash of sadness in his air  
 Born, may be, of his over care,  
 And may be, born of a despair  
 In early love -- I never knew;<sup>23</sup>

Ellen Galt Martin was the only love of Walker's life. A warmth, apparent in his writings during the period of her life, was nowhere more noticable than in his essay, "The Unity of Art." He wrote of a sentiment of love in creation and the three elements which constitute art as Beauty, Truth, and Virtue. Virtue he equated with Love, and patriotism he called the holiest and noblest of feelings.<sup>24</sup> How different was this essay from his book, "The War in Nicaragua", written in the third person, like the books of the first Casear, and as conservative and exact as an equation."<sup>25</sup>

After Miss Martin's death, Walker's overly-serious nature turned to melancholy, and, rudderless again, he made his way to California, but not before his exposure in print of the Lopez expedition to Cuba had caused such flagrant opposition from the exponents of Manifest Destiny that the

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<sup>23</sup>Joaquin Miller, Songs of the Sierras (Chicago: Morrill, Higgins and Co., 1892), p. 29.

<sup>24</sup>William Walker, "The Unity of Art," (Nashville: A. Nolan, Pub., 1848), pp. 3-17.

<sup>25</sup>Joaquin Miller, "That Night in Nicaragua," (Sunset Magazine, XVI, April, 1906), p. 564.

Crescent went down in bankruptcy. Most certainly Walker's bombastic opposition in print helped to expose this operation and cause its abortive result, for in this period of his life, as afterward, Walker never believed in expansion of the United States beyond her borders. None of the territory he ever held was acquired with the purpose of adding it to the boundaries of the United States of America. Walker moved west with the tide of humanity, seeking, not gold, but his one lone tie with humanity, his friend, Edmund Randolph. "From the ashes of a buried love, ambition rose supreme."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Roche, op. cit., p. 61.

## CHAPTER IV

### MATURITY

It is the contention of this paper that during the period from 1850 on, William Walker emerged as perhaps not a new, but certainly a different, personality. The qualities and characteristics that had gone into the make-up of the man himself were either intensified or relaxed, strengthened or weakened, as the case might be. In any instance, the William Walker of the 1850's bore little resemblance to the indecisive, floundering doctor-lawyer-journalist of that earlier time. Scroggs says, "His former studious habits were replaced with daring ambition and reckless disregard of life."<sup>1</sup> Allen attributes this change to the death of Ellen Martin. "From that moment he was changed. The bitterness of the blow struck deep enough to release all the pent-up fire in his being. He looked upon life as something to be won with glory, and upon death as something contemptible to be faced without fear."<sup>2</sup> Whether

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<sup>1</sup>William A. Scroggs, Filibusters and Financiers, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1916), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Merritt Parmallee Allen, William Walker, Filibuster, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), p. 13.

Ellen Martin's death was the real reason or only a contributing factor, Walker himself gave no indication, but assuredly he had now reached a maturity not evident in his earlier life. The decisiveness and purpose that supplanted earlier vacillations were to remain unchanged for the rest of his days.

When William Walker arrived in California in June of 1850, he was only one of a great tide of humanity that swept toward the Pacific. San Francisco, the city of his choice, was a sprawling congregation of thirty-five thousand people, a city of lust and blood, gold and liquor, lawlessness and uncontrolled violence. Hotel rooms rented for one hundred dollars a week and inferior meals cost six dollars. Walker's Scottish heritage must have been shocked to the core by such flagrant extravagance, although wealth had never occupied a high position in his set of values.<sup>3</sup>

Jamison explained the spirit of the times in this manner:

In the 50's men looked upon life from a more romantic viewpoint than they do now. There was more sentiment, more singing of songs, more writing of love verses to sweethearts; grace and gallantry lent a charm to society, as perfume enhances the beauty of roses; the cavalier, with his plumes and ribbons, had not departed, and the music of the troubador

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-21.

still tinkled amidst the sound of revelry. Those were days when the ardor for adventure by land and sea was hot in the breasts of men. In the vast regions of the West, the stars shone upon a primeval wilderness, where there was lure of gold, and where hunger and conflict and even death challenged those whose daring and hardihood defied the vicissitudes of fortune in their search for El Dorado. Men had not outgrown the customs of their forefathers, and if they resorted to the code duello in defense of their honor, and the honor of women, they were moved by sincerity, and surrounded by traditions still too potent to be cast aside.<sup>4</sup>

Walker, caught up in the turbulence of the times, then resumed his career of journalist and soon waged his own personal crusade against not only lawlessness in the city, but also the utter disregard of justice as administered by the courts. His personal vendetta in his position as editor of the San Francisco Herald against one Judge Levi Parsons resulted in his being tried for contempt of court, imprisoned and fined five hundred dollars.<sup>5</sup> When a sympathetic mob threatened to release him by force, his sentence was suspended and he was released, only to be challenged to a duel by a cohort of the judge in question, namely, one Graham Hicks. This was Walker's fourth duel, and he was wounded in the foot by the first shot of his adversary, and though he quickly covered the injured

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<sup>4</sup>James Carson Jamison, With Walker in Nicaragua, (Columbia: E. W. Stephens Publishing Co., 1909), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>William V. Wells, Walker's Expedition to Nicaragua, (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1856), pp. 19-21.

member with sand, a second shot was not permitted, as honor was already satisfied.<sup>6</sup> His resumption of his law career at this time was only a biding of time, a stop-gap until a loftier crusade could be joined. Carr says, "He felt an evangelical mission in which the highest ideals of the America of his time were fused -- the spreading of democracy -- the enhancement of national power -- the uplifting of downtrodden people -- the prevention of fratricidal war."<sup>7</sup>

All agree that the new Walker was physically as unprepossessing as had been the old. A dossier would have listed him as approximately five feet five or six inches in height, weight estimates varied from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and thirty pounds, lank, light brown or sandy hair, freckled, and with a pallor that never resulted in tanning even under a tropical sun. Beardless in an era of luxuriously whiskered men, his overall appearance was nondescript and vague. One feature, however, no one forgot; the eyes, those legendary grey eyes, the eyes which mirrored the soul, no one forgot. "When the heavy

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<sup>6</sup>James Jeffrey Roche, By-Ways of War, (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1901), p. 59.

<sup>7</sup>Albert Z. Carr, The World and William Walker, (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 58.

lids were raised, grey, brilliant, luminous eyes were almost blinding to the observer," Carr said.<sup>8</sup> "When his usually cold nature gave way to anger or excitement, the eyes dilated and kindled with a greenish light, like those of a bird of prey; the thin, short, upper lip became compressed, and the slow, quiet voice rose sharp and short," was Roche's description.<sup>9</sup> "Colonel Walker did not, at the time, impress me as the man of indomitable will and energy which I afterwards found him to be. He was quiet and unassuming 'as mild a mannered man as ever cut a throat or scuttled a ship.' A certain expression of the eye would, however, probably have indicated to a physiognomist the reserve of power veiled under so placid an exterior," wrote the critical Doubleday.<sup>10</sup> Jamison saw him otherwise,

His body was strong and his vital energy surprisingly great. The expression of his countenance was frank and open, and heightened by the absence of a beard of any kind. His aggressive and determined character was plainly indicated by his aquiline nose, while his eyes, from which came the sobriquet, Grey-eyed Man of Destiny, were keen in their scrutiny and almost hypnotic in their power. A woman's voice was scarcely softer than Walker's, and so imperturbable was he that his praise of a valorous deed or his announcement of a death sentence were equally

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>9</sup>Roche, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>10</sup>C. W. Doubleday, Reminiscences of the Filibuster War in Nicaragua (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1886), pp. 104-105.

calm in tone and deliberate in enunciation. Though affable in intercourse, he suppressed his emotions, whether of joy or sadness, and did not permit himself to be startled by surprise. In common with other men, I cannot recall ever having seen him smile. But with all his placidity of voice and demeanor, men leaped eagerly into the very cannon's mouth to obey his commands.<sup>11</sup>

Miller, in his romantic style, sketched him thusly in his poem, "With Walker in Nicaragua:"

A piercing eye, a princely air,  
 A presence like a chevalier,  
 Half angel and half Lucifer;  
 Sombrero black, with plume of snow  
 That swept his long silk locks below;  
 A red serape with bars of gold,  
 All heedless falling, fold on fold,  
 A sash of silk, where flashing swung  
 A sword as swift as serpent's tongue,  
 In sheath of silver chased in gold;  
 And Spanish spurs with bells of steel  
 That dash'd and dangled at the heel;  
 A face of blended pride and pain,  
 Of mingled pleading and disdain,  
 With shades of glory and of grief--  
 The famous filibuster chief.<sup>12</sup>

An odd parallel is found here, for Miller's comparison with Lucifer was an echo of Walker's own feelings. In an address found in his "The Unity of Art," he cited Paradise Lost and Milton's characterization of Lucifer as magnificent. His admiration of the Miltonian Satan is for

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<sup>11</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>12</sup>Joaquin Miller, Song of the Sierras, (Chicago: Morrill, Higgins and Co., 1892), p. 30.

his power and "the unconquerable will," not in lauding the evil aspect of the fight.<sup>13</sup>

In prose, Joaquin Miller again characterized his hero:

General Walker was the cleanest man in word and deed I ever knew. He never used tobacco in any form, never drank anything at all, except water, and always ate most sparingly. He never jested and I cannot recall that I ever saw him smile. He was very thin of flesh and of most impressive presence, especially when on the firing line. At such times he was simply terrible, his gray eyes expanding and glittering like broken steel with the range of battle. He was, in the eyes of his Californians, truly the 'bravest of the brave'.

The strange combination of grotesque outward appearance and inner strength merged into the "prince of American filibusters."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>William Walker, "The Unity of Art," (Nashville, Tenn.: A. Nolan, Pub., 1848), p. 18.

<sup>14</sup>Joaquin Miller, "That Night in Nicaragua," (Sunset Magazine), p. 564.

<sup>15</sup>Allen, op. cit., p. 23.

## CHAPTER V

### PRELUDE TO NICARAGUA

How had William Walker emerged from the cocoon of a nonentity to a historical figure of note? How had a man too reticent and retiring to face a courtroom barrage in New Orleans become a leader of men in California in the short space of three years? Had his abortive attempt to take Lower California and Sonora from the Mexicans in 1853 brought a lust for power to the forefront, or was the latent zeal of the crusader roused from its dormant state and fanned into an unquenchable flame?

Walker himself perhaps gives the most adequate answer. "Unless a man believes there is something great for him to do, he can do nothing. Hence so many captains and reformers of the world have relied on fate and the stars. A great idea springs up in a man's soul; it agitates his whole being, transports him from the ignorant present and makes him feel the future in a moment-----Why should such a revelation be made to him-----if not that he should carry it into practice?"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Z. Carr, The World and William Walker, (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 2.

William Walker's abortive attempt in 1853 to take the Mexican provinces of Lower California and Sonora is noteworthy only in that it proved him to be a leader of men and that his confidence in himself and his men was unshakable, no matter how overwhelming the odds against him were. This area, the most loosely held of all Mexican territory, appeared highly desirable to self-styled conquistadores, and the enthusiasts of Manifest Destiny looked toward this province with lustful eyes. The varied attempts made to acquire it well illustrate the point of scorn Americans felt for international agreements, boundaries and rights. The "shirt sleeves" diplomacy of the lively fifties often bowed to, or even augmented, the hopes of adventurers bent on conquest. Walker's venture into Mexico was only one of several during this period, all of which ended in failure.

To Californians of this era, hostility and contempt were the proper emotions for the Mexican neighbors who were often victims of the Apache and the Comanche. The very hopelessness of this crusade may have appealed to the daring and adventurous. Doubleday related his account of this venture in this manner:

In 1850 he (i. e. Walker) emigrated to California and became editor of the San Francisco Herald. He had previously edited the Crescent of New Orleans. His first military exploit was to raise a band of men with which he invaded the Mexican states of

Lower California and Sonora. The professed object of this expedition was to protect the people of Sonora against the depredations of the Apache Indians, which the Mexican government and that of the state had failed to do.

It is true that no authority from either of these governments had been obtained, and, in the light of Walker's subsequent career, we may easily see that the attainment of supreme power for himself was the spring of action, the restraining of the Apaches being entirely subsidiary. From various causes, which a less sanguine or less fearless man might have foreseen-----, the attempt was a complete failure.<sup>2</sup>

Thus wrote Doubleday, the acid critic, the petulant and jealous contemporary of Walker.

In 1854, Nicaragua was a scene of bloody civil war (a not unusual state of affairs in Central American republics) which had prevailed in Nicaragua intermittently since 1830. A country of about 260,000 population, the depredations of war were such in the Republic of Nicaragua that the ratio of males to females was one to seven. Impressment into the armed forces on one side or the other was the rule and terror tactics in regard to prisoners included bayonetting or burning victims, especially the wounded. The country was almost totally without a system of finance, and international credit was

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<sup>2</sup>C. W. Doubleday, Reminiscences of the Filibuster War in Nicaragua, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1886), p. 106.

non-existent.<sup>3</sup> It was a state of "the politicians ruling and feeding well, the peons drudging and starving."<sup>4</sup> The conservative "calzados," those who wore shoes, were contemptuous of the barefoot rabble and despised foreigners as uncouth barbarians.<sup>5</sup>

The background of the revolution which broke out on May 5, 1854 in Nicaragua was a factional fight for control of the government. Don Fruto Chamorro, elected president in 1851, was ambitious for another term of office. Leader of the Legitimists, he had the support of the church and most of the aristocrats. His opposition was Don Francisco Castellon, choice of the Liberal, or Democratic, party. In the election of 1853, both parties claimed victory and the Legitimists seated their president at Granada, the capital city which was about the size of San Francisco and which lay in the southern half of Nicaragua. The Democrats raised the clamor that Chamorro had been seated illegally and installed Castellon as president

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<sup>3</sup>James Carson Jamison, With Walker in Nicaragua, (Columbia: E. W. Stephens Pub. Co., 1909), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup>Laurence Greene, The Filibuster, (New York: The Bobbs Merrill Co., 1937), p. 55.

<sup>5</sup>James Jeffrey Roche, By-Ways of War, (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1901), p. 98.

in the provincial capital at Leon, which dominated the northern half of the country. Castellon was then arrested by the Legitimist army and banished, whence he took refuge in neighboring Honduras, being graciously received there by the president of that country, Cabanas. On Chamorro's proclaiming himself president for two terms, Castellon and thirty-six followers returned to the city of Leon, whose inhabitants rallied to his support. Though Chamorro died in March 1855, the strength of this party was in no way weakened and a new president, Don Jose Estrada, who was a staunch Legitimist, continued the war from Granada. The Democrats were near despair as several military defeats had severely weakened them and their desperate situation seemed insoluble without foreign help. Generals Jerez and Munoz, for the Democrats each in his turn, sought to contract aid from both American and foreign groups, as did the Legitimists under Corral, and each side was partially successful, for foreign elements served in both the opposing armies.<sup>6</sup>

Back in San Francisco, Byron Cole, owner of the Commercial Advisor, had employed William Walker as editor of his paper. The two men had common ideas and ideals in their avid concern for the destiny of Nicaragua. Cole,

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<sup>6</sup>Roche, op. cit., pp. 65-98.

an ex-Bostonian editor, had visited the Democratic camp in Nicaragua and had attempted to draw up a contract. At the same time Jerez had made one or two offers to other groups in seeking aid for the struggling faction. Thomas Fisher, C. C. Hornsby, Julius de Brissot, and Henry Crabbe, the latter a Nashvillian and a schoolmate of Walker's, had visited Nicaragua and had explored the possibilities in both the Legitimist and Democratic camps. Eventually a contract was made with Jerez and this group, but Crabbe decided against the venture at the last moment.<sup>7</sup> Cole, now acting as Walker's emissary, persuaded the three to join him and the pact was made. Cole now contracted for three hundred American "colonists liable for military duty" in return for extensive land and the privilege of becoming citizens.<sup>8</sup> Though badly organized, the Vesta, bearing Walker and his men, set sail for Nicaragua on May 4, 1855. Short of money, with antiquated equipment, with but fifty-eight of the contracted three hundred "colonists," the mission was successfully launched, though not without harassment from U. S. port officials who sought to restrain militaristic ventures in the name of neutrality.

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<sup>7</sup>Laurence Greene, The Filibuster, (New York: The Bobbs Merrill Co., 1937), p. 63.

<sup>8</sup>Carr, op. cit., pp. 91-97.

William Walker and his fifty-eight<sup>9</sup> Immortals were a true cross section of the America of the 1850's. From every part of the Union, from every walk of life, for a multitude of reasons, with a multiplicity of aims and dreams, the face of each turned southward. These men of California had only two things in common; namely, iron nerves and dauntless courage. They are pictured by historian and biographer in the same light as their leader, all black or all shining white with no intermittent shades of grey. Greene saw them thusly:

Walker always thought of his soldiers as noble regenerators -- as an army with banners -- but he led little better than a gang. The men knew no discipline. They had come here to fight and seduce and kill. They would plunder, given any chance.<sup>10</sup>

From a popular newspaper of the day came this description:

The appearance of Walker and his men is truly striking, and reminds one of novel descriptions of forest brigands. Their dress consists of heavy felt hats, with red ribbons, blue woollen [sic] shirts, coarse pants and heavy boots; a strap around their waists contains revolver and knife, and a rifle in hand finds them fully equipped. Many of them are perfect gentlemen, of good families and education, who, no doubt from change of fortune in the fluctuating land of California, have been

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Greene, op. cit., p. 65.

induced to embrace this hazardous expedition. Truly they are a brave body of men.<sup>11</sup>

Jamison, himself a filibuster and a romanticist, wrote in this manner of his comrades:

Many were drawn to Nicaragua by the desire for adventure in foreign land, land that had felt the tread of Spanish conquistadores in centuries long past, where beautiful cities with palaces and cathedrals had risen under the patronage of the Spanish crown, and where country estates stretched league upon league to the horizon. Such were the men who took service under Walker, and were led by him in his desperate struggles to make real a dream that might have dazzled the great Corsican himself.<sup>12</sup>

He concludes:

Many of the adventurous followers that General Walker drew to his banner were men of lively imagination and much physical prowess, susceptible to the charms of beautiful women and acquainted with the pleasures of elegant society. In a remoter age their very temperament would have led them to fight the Saracenic hosts of Saladin or, again, to risk their lives against the Moors in Spain. Though, occasionally there may have been found a Falstaff, yet there were men who would have been worthy the companionship of the knightly Chandos.<sup>13</sup>

General Charles Francis Henningsen is quoted as saying:

I have heard two greasy privates disputing over the correct reading and comparative merits of Aeschylus

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<sup>11</sup>San Francisco Times, Oct. 25, 1955.

<sup>12</sup>James Carson Jamison, With Walker in Nicaragua, (Columbia: E. W. Stephens Pub. Co., 1909), p. 13.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

and Euripides. I have seen a soldier on guard incessantly scribbling strips of paper, which turned out to be a finely versified translation of his dog's-eared copy of the Divina Commedia,<sup>14</sup>

and later in life following Confederate service in the bloodiest battles of the Civil War he said,

If I had been allowed to pick five thousand of the bravest Confederate or Federal soldiers I ever saw, and could resurrect and pit one thousand of such men as lie beneath the orange trees of Nicaragua, I feel that the thousand would have scattered and utterly routed the five thousand within an hour.<sup>15</sup>

Joaquin Miller eulogizes them thus:

What strange, strong bearded men are these  
He led toward the tropic seas!  
Men sometimes of uncommon birth,  
Men rich in histories untold,  
Who boasted not, though more than bold,  
Blown from the four parts of the earth.

Men mighty-thew'd as Samson was,  
That had been kings in any cause,  
A remnant of the races past;  
Dark-brow'd as if in iron cast,  
Broad-breasted as twin gates of brass--  
Men strangely brave and fiercely true,  
Who err'd, yet bravely dared to err;  
A remnant of that early few  
Who held no crime or curse or vice  
As dark as that of cowardice.<sup>16</sup>

Walker said of them in his terse way, "They were

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<sup>14</sup>Greene, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>15</sup>Roche, op. cit., pp. 193-194.

<sup>16</sup>Joaquin Miller, Songs of the Sierras, (Chicago: Morrill, Higgins and Co., 1892), p. 31.

all young men, and youth is apt to err in pulling down before it is ready to build up. But they were men, also, full of military fire and thirsting for military reputation."<sup>17</sup> Of a certainty he endowed them with qualities of steadfastness, courage and imagination. "They were most of them men of strong character, tired of the hum-drum of common life, and ready for a career which might bring them the sweets of adventure or the rewards of fame."<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps every statement made about the components of Walker's hodge-podge army is true. He attracted to his banner some criminal and lawless elements, some elite and many in-between. They came from far and near, and they represented a cross-section of humanity as does any army. In a skirmish, one of Walker's patrols was ambushed and several were captured and shot. Of these, six were United States citizens, three came from Ireland, three from Germany, two from France, one from Italy, one from Corfu, one from Samos, one from Panama and one from Cuba. Perhaps nine out of ten came from California, or from men who had migrated to California, and they boasted that "California

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<sup>17</sup>William Walker, War in Nicaragua, (Mobile, Alabama: S. H. Goetzel and Co., 1860), p. 23.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>19</sup>Roche, op. cit., p. 128.

was the pick of the world and that they were the pick of California."19

An estimated guess is that five thousand Americans who served under Walker died in Nicaragua from disease or from battle. This figure may not be impressive but it represents five-sevenths of the total figure who died in the entire American Revolution.20

An extended list of names of persons long dead can grow tedious, but a recounting of some few who figured prominently in action or whose names are well known perhaps is in order. Their names are recorded by practically every historian who wrote about the filibuster war, and a selected few are mentioned here along with their place of residence, when known.

Anderson, Major Frank New York-Mexican War Veteran.

Clinton, DeWitt New York-Descendant of famous political family.

Cole, Byron Boston, Mass. Editor.

Crocker, Timothy Veteran of Sonora campaign. Killed at Battle of Rivas. Walker described him as having "the heart of

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19Roche, op. cit., p. 128.

20Ibid., p. 193.

- a lion" and said his death was "a loss hardly to be repaired."<sup>21</sup>
- Davidson, George R. Frankfort, Ky.-Mexican War Veteran.
- de Goicouria, Domingo Cuba-Often called "the liberator."
- Doubleday, Charles Ohio-British by birth-Commissary officer on Walker's staff. Author.
- Fayssoux, C. Irvine Walker's only naval commander-His ship was the Granada. His paternal grandfather had been chief surgeon of the Carolina forces in the American Revolution, while his maternal grandfather, General Irvine, had commanded a division under Washington at the crossing of the Delaware.
- Gilman, Charles Baltimore, Md. one legged veteran of the Sonora campaign. Later lawyer and legislator in California.
- Henningsen, Gen.  
Charles Fredrick Belgian by birth-Served on Kossuth's staff. A trained and accomplished man of arms. Walker "never had cause to regret the confidence he placed in the capacity of Henningsen."<sup>22</sup> Later served in Civil War.
- Hornsby, C. C. Mexican War Veteran.
- Jamison, James C. Missouri-Author.
- Jones, Dr. Alexander Had made an extensive hunt in the Indian Ocean for buried treasure.
- Kewen, Achilles A veteran of Sonora. Killed in battle of Rivas, Walker said of

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<sup>21</sup>Walker, War in Nicaragua, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 300-301.

him, "His chivalrous spirit would have weighed against a host of common men."<sup>23</sup>

Leslie, Samuel	Captain in Walker's army-Called "Cherokee Sam," he was a full-blooded Cherokee Indian.
Miller, Joaquin	Poet and dramatist.
Rudler, A. F.	Walker's next in command. Sentenced to death along with Walker, his friends later secured his release.
Schlessinger, Louis	Prussian officer.
Stanley, Walter	Oregon-Present at Walker's execution.
Sutter, W. A.	California-Son of discoverer of gold.
Tabor, John	Editor of <u>El Nicarguense</u> , Walker's newspaper.
Von Natzmer	Prussian cavalry officer.
Walker, James	Youngest sibling of William Walker. Died of yellow fever.
Ward, Fredrick Townsend	Later in China, he won fame as Chief Commander of Taiping Rebellion.

To this list should be added William V. Wells, Consul General of Honduras and grandson of Samuel Adams who extended aid in many forms to Walker, though he did not engage in active fighting.

What appeal did the taciturn Walker have to such a group? Certainly there is little question that he dominated,

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

that he, and he alone, was in command of his army. In his altercation with Doubleday, as an example, it was Doubleday who resigned. Walker says of this incident that Doubleday had given an uninvited opinion and that he had informed his commissary that when his opinion was needed he would ask for it. "It was of the first necessity," Walker said, "for the force to feel that it had but one head."<sup>24</sup>

William Walker's appeal was that age-old appeal of praise compounded with the ability to inspire men to the heights. No cold, haughty tyrant could have inspired a handful of men and held their devotion. He filled them with a sense of duty, importance and dedication that sustained and uplifted them. Walker himself revealed that he tried constantly to fill them with the idea that, though they were few in number, they were "the precursors of a movement destined to affect materially the civilization of the whole continent. Thus filled with the importance of the events in which they were participating, the Falange became capable of performing worthily the part assigned them."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

In another passage, at a time when his troops were generally depressed, Walker talked to them of "the moral grandeur of the position they occupied. Alone in the world, without a friendly government to give even its sympathy, much less its aid, they had nothing to support them in the struggle with the neighboring States save the justice of their cause. Maligned by those who should have befriended them, and betrayed by those they had benefited, they had to choose between basely yielding their rights and nobly dying for them."<sup>26</sup> Thus by constant appeals to the lofty qualities of his soldiers, Walker touched the often deep-buried crusader and made him not only a good, but an inspired soldier, one who jumped into a lion's den or a cannon's mouth on command. He understood perfectly the spirit of the men he commanded. If he adopted an attitude of studied formality toward his officers, it was not through lack of interest or concern, it was rather his etiquette of proper military bearing and his intense desire for formal military discipline. He never wore a uniform, though many of his officers wore the uniforms of their rank in the United States army, and were splendidly decked out, having brought their own regalia with them.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

Walker invited his men to be a part of a glorious movement; he urged that they be true to themselves and to the Republic for which they fought. Jamison recorded that Walker told them, on one occasion, that "the eyes of the civilized world were upon them, and that they would be praised and honored, or scorned and reviled, according to the record of glory or shame they achieved. I have never," he concluded, "forgotten his closing sentence: 'A name is great only as the principle it represents makes it great.'"<sup>27</sup>

One institution of honor which Walker advocated was that of the code of dueling. In Nicaragua, Walker himself did not engage in this time-honored method of affairs of honor, though it was rather because of his high position than for any other reason. In the past he had often entered into such affairs and thoroughly approved of such conduct. Many of the officers, in particular, fought duels, and some "could no more refrain from a duel than a boy could keep away from a game of marbles."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 108

## CHAPTER VI

### QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP

Qualities of leadership were a vital part of the make-up of William Walker, unquestioned even by his severest critics. His ability to control his Falange was remarkable, in view of the heterogeneous groups included in it. He knew his men and their temperaments, and apparently his genius in controlling them was the centerpiece on which the whole organization hung. He termed inaction the most trying single factor with which he had to deal. The thirst for action he deemed a typical American characteristic. Garrison life led to all sorts of demoralizing actions and, while he himself was a total abstainee in regard to alcohol, drinking posed a real problem.<sup>1</sup> Toward desertion he had no mercy, and he allowed no sentiment to be attached to military necessity. He termed a military execution "a good test of military discipline," though he recognized it to be a repulsive duty.<sup>2</sup> He expected the highest conduct from

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<sup>1</sup>William Walker, War in Nicaragua, (Mobile, Alabama: S. H. Goetzel and Co., 1860), p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

his officers and was usually gratified by having his expectations fulfilled. These random characteristics in no way define the real qualities of leadership which are usually associated with Walker, and his contemporaries found them as elusive and intangible as do his biographers.

Doubleday stated that he possessed, "a character singularly free from the petty traits and vices of ordinary men," and that he himself had "a high admiration for his splendid courage."<sup>3</sup> He further spoke of his admiration for "This extraordinary man of wonderful energy, courage and personal integrity."<sup>4</sup>

The vitriolic Horace Greeley wrote that Walker "never evinced much military or other capacity," but "excited much admiration among the more reckless youth of our great cities, especially of the South."<sup>5</sup>

Harper's Weekly saw him otherwise:

We have again and again called Walker a hero-----We are obliged to recognize a persistence, an endurance, a resolute heroism which merit a higher place in human esteem than can be ceded to all the knights errant of history and Faerydom-----The difference is that ours is a nineteenth century hero. Who knows

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<sup>3</sup>C. W. Doubleday, Reminiscences of the Filibuster War in Nicaragua, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1886), p. iii (Preface).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>5</sup>Horace Greeley, The American Conflict, (Chicago: O. D. Case and Co., 1864), p. 276.

how soon he may replace the laurel of hero with the diadem of a king?<sup>6</sup>

Jamison, the staunch admirer, wrote:

Of the highest intellectuality, steel-like in its strength, and of indomitable will power, he governed and controlled his men in a way that not only beat down opposition, but drew them to him in unswerving fidelity. Decision and promptness marked all his actions and impulses. To show his stern and inflexible character, I saw him reduce to the ranks his own brother, Captain Norvel Walker,-----for an infraction of military discipline.<sup>7</sup>

In another passage, Jamison said, "General Walker was a disciplinarian in whom stern conscience had made compact with honor, and for violation of the rules of war he inflicted relentlessly the death penalty upon both friend and foe."<sup>8</sup>

Joaquin Miller characterized him in the following manner:

His dress, language and bearing were those of a clergyman when not on the firing line, and his whole time was spent in reading. He never wasted a moment in idle talk, never took advice,<sup>9</sup> but always gave commands and they must be obeyed.<sup>9</sup>

First and foremost, then, he enjoyed the highest respect among the men he led into battle. This respect

<sup>6</sup>Harper's Weekly, Jan. 31, 1857, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup>James Carson Jamison, With Walker in Nicaragua, (Columbia: E. W. Stephens Pub. Co., 1909), p. 20.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>Miller, Sunset Magazine, XVI, Apr., 1906, p. 558.

stemmed from the personal attributes of the man himself. His irreproachable private life was unsullied by slurs or stains. True, there was gossip among the soldiery which linked his name with that of a Nicaraguan socialite, Dona Irena Ohoran, but Carr states this was "no ordinary affair of the flesh."<sup>10</sup> Walker himself used no soft speech of love in his narrative account, simply stating that he "took up his quarters at the house of a woman of middle age, called generally by the people, Nina Yrena."<sup>11</sup> "Nina" is the Spanish term of endearment meaning "little one," but Walker, by inference, never used this sobriquet in referring to his hostess. He endowed her, verbally, "with all the gravity and apparent indifference of the native race," stating that she was "a quick and minute observer."<sup>12</sup> In the same passage he hinted that she had been the mistress of a leading Legitimist, Espinosa, and that, as she was "fertile in resources for sending intelligence to her friends," he soon moved to "the government house on the

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<sup>10</sup>Albert Z. Carr, The World and William Walker, (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 137.

<sup>11</sup>Walker, War in Nicaragua, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

Plaza."<sup>13</sup> Apparently a would-be Mata Hari had no place in the life of the ascetic Walker.<sup>14</sup>

Jamison, in an excellent description of day-to-day living among the military, recounted much merry-making. Drinking bouts were frequent, regimental bands played stirring music, and card playing and other forms of gambling were very prevalent. He hastened to add, however, that "General Walker was never present at these festivities and if he ever drank at all, I never knew it."<sup>15</sup> If Walker made no protest at such debauchment among his troops, his pen spoke for him: "It would have been better for the discipline and spirit of the troops," he wrote, "if they had remained less inactive and in small bodies at Granada. -----The quantity of liquor there, and the fondness of many officers for drink, not only injured the health of the

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>If Walker refused to bend to the enchantment of tropical nights and smiling señoritas, many of his men took advantage of those opportunities. Jamison, almost lyrical, described great haciendas and magnificent homes where aristocratic families lived in wealth and luxury. The society he termed one of elegance and brilliancy, delicacy and refinement. He found the ladies of Castillian blood more attractive than their swarthier sisters and further said that many American soldiers, like the Lotus-Eaters, married Nicaraguan women, became citizens of that country, and never returned home. (Jamison, op. cit., pp. 115-116.)

<sup>15</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 118.

troop, but tended materially to prevent its growth in military virtue."<sup>16</sup> In this statement Walker classified himself not only as physical mentor to his troops in his capacity as physician, but also, in the same sense as "Stonewall" Jackson or Oliver Cromwell, as moral and spiritual advisor. As minister to their bodies, during an outbreak of cholera, his diligent care of the stricken earned for him the label of "Uncle Billy" from his troops, which is said to have privately amused him.<sup>17</sup>

If Walker had concern about the health of his troops, for his own body he showed little concern. He amazed both natives and soldiers by the length of his work day, which began at six A.M. and ended at ten P.M. In emergency situations he often slept not at all.<sup>18</sup> Greene stated that he was "as rigidly puritanical in his sleeping as in his other habits; he had contempt for the man who drowns on awakening and needs coffee and time to recapture his faculties."<sup>19</sup> Above all, Walker felt the physical must

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<sup>16</sup>Walker, War in Nicaragua, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>17</sup>Carr, op. cit., p. 130.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>19</sup>Laurence Greene, The Filibuster, (New York: The Bobbs Merrill Co., 1937), p. 128.

bow to the mental.<sup>20</sup> His description of "a violent attack of the fever" which rendered him "scarcely able to sit up" indicated a serious illness, yet when he received a message detailing a disastrous defeat of his troops, he immediately got up and boarded a boat which would bear him to his destination.<sup>21</sup> "The necessity for mental and moral action," he stated, "has a wonderful effect in driving the reluctant body to perform the tasks the will imposes."<sup>22</sup>

If Walker appeared impassive in the face of disease and death, he donned a mask to conceal his real feelings, for he referred to these implacable enemies many times in his writings. Once he said,

I have seen men die in many ways. I have seen them gasping life away under the effects of typhus; I have seen them convulsed in the death agony from the fearful blows of cholera; I have seen them sink to glorious rest from mortal wounds received on honorable fields; but I never saw the first man who repented ~~engaging~~ in the cause for which he yielded his life.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>His interest in mesmerism had occupied both time and thought in his study of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. (Carr, op. cit., p. 10.) This episode may well be an example of the practical application of that study, or it may simply exhibit an intense willpower.

<sup>21</sup>Walker, War in Nicaragua, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

Again he decried the fact that his officers, "zealous in the pursuit of duty," and who most often "sought posts of danger" seemed more apt to be victims of disease than others who could have been "better spared."<sup>24</sup>

His humane qualities extended beyond his own troops to those of the enemy who were wounded, sick, or captured. Almost every historian who has dealt with the militaristic view of the civil war in Nicaragua has described all too vividly the treatment of these unfortunates at the hands of the enemy. Death by bayonet or burning was a usual practice, and Walker's patience was sorely tried in his attempt to secure humane treatment for his captured prisoners. The amazed Nicaraguan soldier had great difficulty restraining his wrath when his desire for vengeance was uppermost in his mind. Don Jose Maria Valle, a part Indian officer whose merit Walker recognized, was one of those who felt the lash of Walker's tongue over treatment of prisoners. Valle, an adept propagandist, rode "through villages and hamlets," extolling the virtues of "the generous Americans" who had come to help them in their struggles against the Granadians.

Nor was his influence confined to the men. When he took his guitar in hand he would carry the women away with his songs of love or of patriotism; and the control he exercised over the women was not to be

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

despised in a country where they serve to some extent the use of newspapers, at the same time scattering news and forming opinion.<sup>25</sup>

Thus spoke Walker, the journalist, but Walker, the militarist, hesitated not a moment in placing his pistol at Valle's forehead to emphasize that death was forthcoming if more prisoners were mistreated.

If prisoners of war received fair treatment at his hand, the civilian population had extended to it the same general courtesies. Even his most critical biographers call attention to this fact. A classic example of this is found in Granada, where the streets were well policed by the Falange, the women were unmolested, and the merchants treated fairly. "The Filibuster had, in some respects, genius, and it was demonstrated here."<sup>26</sup> Of the capture of Granada, Jamison wrote: "The American element exercised gentleness and kindness under the orders of their chief."<sup>27</sup> A general statement from Joaquin Miller declared: "On entering a town he, (Walker), as a rule, issued a proclamation making death the penalty alike for

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>26</sup>Greene, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>27</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 44.

insulting a woman, for theft or for entering a church, save as a Christian should."<sup>28</sup> The accolade of Jamison that "Walker was not made of the material that would bow the suppliant knee to wrong in any quarter" fits well with this picture of Walker, the conqueror.<sup>29</sup>

If Walker was humane in victory, he was imperturbable in defeat. Doubleday has characterized him as a brave man but an inept leader and accused him of "occasioning frequent and useless loss of life."<sup>30</sup> The egotistical Doubleday wrote much of his own personal heroism, saying that during the battle of Rivas he took command, as Walker seemed stricken with a torpor. That night he and Walker stood watch and Walker soon went to sleep at his post.<sup>31</sup> (These and other accusations are not mentioned by any other source, and the dispute between Walker and Doubleday resulted in the latter resigning from the army.) Jamison described Walker as "inscrutable as a Sphinx" after the battle of Rivas.<sup>32</sup> If he was disheartened it was not

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<sup>28</sup>Miller, Sunset Magazine, op. cit., p. 565.

<sup>29</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>30</sup>Doubleday, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 120-142.

<sup>32</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 87.

apparent in either his voice or his face.

The faculty for keeping his own counsel and preserving the most placid and mild demeanor under the greatest tribulation never once forsook him; this peculiarity was not an affectation, but was as naturally a part of the man as the flesh and blood that composed his body. What other men deemed obstacles insurmountable Walker put aside with a wave of his hand.<sup>33</sup>

Wells wrote that he was a man of genius and quick comprehension and further endowed him with steady perseverance and patience.<sup>34</sup> Miller called him "true as God's north star, and brave as Yuba's grizzlies are."<sup>35</sup> Those qualities of the Scot, tenacity, singleness of purpose, imperturbability, all stood him in good stead in his career. The steadiness of the surgeon, the strategy of the courtroom, the persuasiveness of the journalist he put to use in the supreme effort of his life in Nicaragua.

It is impossible to sift men through a sieve and find the elusive ingredients that add up to leadership. It is even more improbable that a slight, soft-spoken man who passed unnoticed in crowds is coupled by historian and biographer alike with Napoleon, Cortez, Savonarola,

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>34</sup>William V. Wells, Walker's Expedition to Nicaragua, (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1856), p. 43.

<sup>35</sup>Miller, Songs of the Sierras, op. cit., p. 29.

Cromwell and "Stonewall" Jackson, but contemporaries and present day writers have often used such comparisons. Similarities do exist; like Napoleon, he was small in stature and believed implicitly in his destiny; like Cortez, he headed an army of volunteers and conquered in Central America; like the last three, he was an ascetic, though there is no record of his ever preaching a sermon, singing a psalm, or praying before battle. The men in his command valued his courage and tenacity; his captives gave thanks for his humanity; his Nicaraguan allies applauded his industry and perseverance. But these qualities have been found in other men who never had a following, who were never leaders of men. Some more vital element lay concealed in the person of William Walker.

## CHAPTER VII

### WALKER, THE NICARAGUAN

It is the opinion herein held that William Walker, from the moment he set foot on the soil of Nicaragua, became more native than the wealthiest grandee or the lowest peon. Nicaragua became to him mother, wife and country; to this new love he offered his love, his life and his most sacred honor. He had not felt this in his attempt at taking Sonora; when defeat was obvious, he sought escape. In Nicaragua, the odds were never too great; three times he only sought return when forced to leave. This love for Nicaragua became meat and drink, air and water. Not blind and insatiable ambition, not dictator mania, not expansion of slavery, nor yet a superstitious regard for destiny motivated Walker in Nicaragua. The thesis to be proven here is that William Walker had found his home, his vocation, his avocation, his family, his place in life. The wanderer roamed no more; the vacillating doctor-lawyer-journalist was a man of purpose, and to that purpose he sacrificed himself and others. If he used lesser men in his paramount scheme and laid the victims on the altar, it was a holy offering to the land of Nicaragua. The flame of devotion was to be extinguished

only at Truxillo on September 12, 1860.

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To probe the heart of a man as reticent as William Walker, undemonstrative and inscrutable, is a difficult task. Perhaps no man ever exhibited less of the egotist than he. His account of the war has completely eliminated self except in a few instances; it is even written in the impersonal third person. His only other published work teems with abstractions and lack of personal comment. For this reason, students of Walker have taken him at face value with little effort at probing for the inner secrets behind the Sphinx-like facade.

The first hint of Walker's feelings is found in his description of the countryside on his initial entry. Jamison, Miller and Doubleday all had lyrical entries regarding the beauty of this tropical paradise, if this point should be in question, but in Walker, such rhapsodies are a rare and distinct departure from his usual prosaic speech. These three frequently engaged in emotional discourses, but such verbiage is foreign to Walker's style.

(The scene) was a vision of enchantment. The lake of Nicaragua lay in full view, and rising from it, as Venus from the sea, was the tall and graceful cone of Omotipe. The dark forests of the tropics clothed the side of the volcano, which seemed to repose under the influence of the soft sunshine around it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Walker, War in Nicaragua, (Mobile, Alabama: S. H. Goetzel and Co., 1860), p. 49.

Thus, in his first view of the land, Walker used the love goddess for a comparison.

A second and telling point in regard to Walker's love of country is his adoption of Catholicism. Later writers have argued this point, but have overlooked or deemphasized certain bits of evidence that seem conclusive.

Walker, by heritage a Protestant, had been brought up by a stern father in a stern faith.<sup>2</sup> All through his years he had not wavered in his religious convictions. In his address delivered to the Alumni Society of the University of Nashville on October 3, 1848, he had stated, "Religion keeps alive the sacred flame of virtue that burns from age to age in the breasts of the great and the good."<sup>3</sup> During his ill-fated venture into Lower California in 1853, he wrote, "And for the success of our enterprise, we put our trust in Him who controls the destinies of nations."<sup>4</sup> A further statement regarding the same cause

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<sup>2</sup>According to one historian, Walker, after graduation from college, professed religion and became a member of the Christian (Disciples of Christ) Church (William A. Scroggs, Filibusters and Financiers, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1916), p. 12). Another stated he joined the Baptist Church soon after graduation. (Jane Thomas, Old Days in Nashville, (copyright page missing: 1895), p. 78.)

<sup>3</sup>William Walker, "The Unity of Art," Appendix 31, (Nashville, Tennessee: A. Nolan Pub., 1848), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>William Walker, War in Nicaragua, op. cit., p. 33.

avowed, "Religion will be respected and all will be encouraged in their reverence of the Great Being without whose aid all earthly purposes fail."<sup>5</sup> No writer has questioned that William Walker was a man with deep religious convictions.

The petty point of whether Walker converted to Catholicism, and if he did, whether it was due to personal conviction or to political expediency, has often been raised. In his book he wrote,

It is very acceptable for me to hear that the authority of the Church will be used in favor of the existing Government. Without the aid of religious sentiments and religious teachers there can be no good government; for the fear of God is the foundation of all social and political organization. In God I put my trust for the success of the cause in which I am embarked and for the maintenance of the principles I advocate. Without His aid all human efforts are unavailing, but with His divine assistance, a few may triumph over a legion.<sup>6</sup>

Implied in every way is Walker's acceptance of the authority of the Church in its policies.

Perhaps the most telling statement made by Walker on the religious issue is the following: "Although Walker had been educated a Protestant, he had no objection to kneeling before the crucifix--the symbol of salvation to

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

all Christians."<sup>7</sup> Such universalism was not a concept held by those Protestant sects with whom Walker supposedly affiliated. On the day following Walker's capture of Granada, he attended eight o'clock mass, though he was, as yet, no Catholic.<sup>8</sup> The same source stated that after Walker finished his book, (i.e., War in Nicaragua) he suddenly converted to Catholicism. "He had been reared in a strict Protestant atmosphere, but he had belonged to no church at any time in his life."<sup>9</sup> That he should seek to unite with the Church at this time is called an attempt to appease the Central Americans.<sup>10</sup>

A Nashville newspaper in a front page story reported this obituary notice:

Captain James Walker, Company A, 2nd Light Infantry Battalion, youngest brother of General (William) Walker, was killed in action after having arrived in Nicaragua only eight weeks before. Before his death, he confessed himself and holy sacrament was

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>8</sup>Laurence Greene, The Filibuster, (New York: The Bobbs Merrill Co., 1937), p. 114.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>10</sup>Greene, loc. cit.

administered by the Catholic Church. His last wish was to be buried as a true believer in that religion.<sup>11</sup> Not only William Walker, but also his brother, converted, it would appear.

Jamison stated that General Walker was "constitutionally temperate in his habits, of innate refinement, and in religion a Roman Catholic."<sup>12</sup> Joaquin Miller also affirmed Walker's religious affiliation, writing that, "He lived and died a devout Roman Catholic."<sup>13</sup>

In the records dealing with Walker's execution, most authorities concede he was attended by two priests and that his last moments appeared to have been engaged in "earnest religious devotions."<sup>14</sup> Jamison, who had the account from an eye-witness, stated that he "carried a crucifix in his hand, being a Catholic."<sup>15</sup>

Apparently William Walker, then, departed from his religious heritage of unyielding Protestantism and gave his full devotion to the faith of his adopted homeland.

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<sup>11</sup>Nashville Republican Banner, June 8, 1855.

<sup>12</sup>James Carson Jamison, With Walker in Nicaragua, (Columbia: E. W. Stephens Pub. Co., 1909), p. 19.

<sup>13</sup>Joaquin Miller, "That Night in Nicaragua," (Sunset Magazine, XVI, April, 1906), p. 564.

<sup>14</sup>Scroggs, op. cit., p. 391.

<sup>15</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 176.

He had written: "'By the cross thou shalt conquer' is as clearly written in the pages of history as when the startled emperor saw it blazing in letters of light athwart the heavens,"<sup>16</sup> and Walker had, in his quest, conquered not only the cross but also by the rosary.

On coming to Nicaragua, William Walker did not, as he had done at Sonora, come uninvited. The contract which Byron Cole had made with the Democratic faction not only offered emoluments of land but also conferred citizenship. Jamison wrote, "Walker and all his men made a simple declaration of intention and each became a citizen of Nicaragua entitled to all rights and privileges."<sup>17</sup> Doubleday, who had been in Nicaragua and had been offered similar considerations, said that both Walker and his "colonists" were to receive grants of land and all were to become naturalized citizens.<sup>18</sup> A grant of fifty-two thousand acres was made to the citizen-colonists and they "were liable for military duty."<sup>19</sup> Wells, the grandson of Samuel

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<sup>16</sup>Walker, War in Nicaragua, op. cit., p. 430.

<sup>17</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>18</sup>C. W. Doubleday, Reminiscences of the Filibuster War in Nicaragua, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1886), p. 62.

<sup>19</sup>Albert Z. Carr, The World and William Walker, (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 92.

Adams, spoke with a fire equal to that of his sire when he answered Walker's critics:

Let those who brand the advent of General Walker as a movement of filibusters remember that he visited Central America at the repeated solicitation of the most eminent men of the country and recognized among her most distinguished patriots.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time he eulogized Walker as a liberator.

After the fall of Granada, a treaty was drawn up between the warring factions and both Legitimists and Democrats agreed to live up to the terms of the agreement made with Walker and his colonists.

The act of 23 October was, therefore, in the fullest sense of the word, an act of the sovereignty of Nicaragua; and therefore no party had the right to say that the Americans were domiciled in the State and engaged in its military service without its consent.<sup>21</sup>

But peace did not come easily to a country so long engaged in fratricidal war. Doubleday stated that Walker's policies never fostered any measures that looked to a real peace, but this disgruntled author's opinion was not held by Jamison or other contemporaries.<sup>22</sup> The Nashville Republican Banner of July 19, 1855 stated in a terse notice that President Rivas of Nicaragua had fled and had placed

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<sup>20</sup>William V. Wells, Walker's Expedition to Nicaragua, (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1856), p. 49.

<sup>21</sup>Walker, War in Nicaragua, op. cit., p. 134.

<sup>22</sup>Doubleday, op. cit., p. 164.

all power in the hands of General Walker, who had proclaimed martial law until an election could be held. Citizen Walker was now unofficial head of government. At this time, Walker was petitioned by many citizens of both parties to assume the Presidency, but he steadfastly refused.<sup>23</sup> The man who considered himself the apostle of democracy would in no wise accept the position of dictator. As events later proved, such a coup d'etat was wholly unnecessary, for at the polls, Walker was the choice of the electorate. Walker's Indian friends were not unmindful of his help against the Legitimist aristocracy, and among these his majority was heavy. These same Indians had given rise to one of those legends that prove so colorful in the lives of historical figures. Shortly after Walker captured Granada, a group of Indians, primitives from a mountainous sector of the country, requested an audience with him. On being granted permission to see him, for several moments they sat quietly, peering intently into his face. At last, satisfied with what they had seen, they rose and solemnly informed him that he was the long awaited redeemer who was to bring the people of Nicaragua into the light. This redeemer was to help them regain their position of honor which had been

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<sup>23</sup>Doubleday, op. cit., p. 164.

wrested from them by the Spaniards. The messiah would be easily recognized, they averred, by his brilliant grey eyes. After formal recognition by the group, the Indians took their departure and left Walker with the sobriquet which has ever since been coupled with his name, "the grey-eyed man of destiny."<sup>24</sup>

In a field of four candidates, Walker received a landslide majority. The final count showed Walker 15,835 with Ferrer, his closest rival, receiving 4,447. The coming inauguration was described in this manner:

The President, who is to be inaugurated this day, has no other wish than the welfare of the Republic at heart, and his commanding abilities and unflinching nerve will enable him to guide the Ship of State with precision through the rocks and shoals that threaten to beset her.<sup>25</sup>

The Nashville Republican Banner vividly described the inauguration of July 12, 1856, in the flag-decked Plaza.<sup>26</sup> (The British flag was purposefully omitted, in view of that nation's hostility to the "filibuster," a term much used by that nation to discredit a movement which might destroy their dominance over the feeble governments of the

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<sup>24</sup>Carr, op. cit., pp. 141-142.

<sup>25</sup>New Orleans True Delta, July 26, 1856.

<sup>26</sup>Nashville Republican Banner, Aug. 1, 1856.

West Indies and Central America.)<sup>27</sup> From a legal viewpoint, Walker's title was now as sound as that of any prince or president in the world. Even foreign recognition was not too far distant, for the United States minister, Colonel John H. Wheeler, on an order of Secretary Marcy to extend recognition to the Rivas government, carried out his instructions after President Walker had been inaugurated. He duly tendered to that nation the good wishes and felicitations of the United States Government.<sup>28</sup>

Thus by every law in the world, William Walker had a perfect right to consider himself as a true citizen of Nicaragua. He had been naturalized, his military position had been legalized, and he had now been duly elected president, with formal recognition by his powerful neighbor to the north. In a speech to his soldiers he spoke of having voluntarily expatriated himself, and to him this was no idle talk; Walker sincerely considered himself a Nicaraguan. Even the Congress of the United States considered him to be an expatriate. Senator Douglas in a speech stated:

When Walker went from California, on his first expedition to Nicaragua, and became naturalized

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<sup>27</sup>Doubleday, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>28</sup>James Jeffrey Roche, By-Ways of War, (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1901), p. 142.

there, he was from that moment a citizen of Nicaragua, and not a citizen of the United States. You have no more right to treat Walker as a citizen of the United States than Great Britain has to follow an Irishman to this country and claim he is a British subject, after he has been naturalized here.-----Walker is a Nicaraguan and not an American. Since he has been President of that Republic, organized as such, it is too late for us to deny that he is a citizen of that country, or to claim that he is an American citizen.<sup>29</sup>

Ever after, when fortune turned against him, and he was forced to leave the country, his every plan was toward return. Senator Seward vehemently decried the fact that Walker had expressed his determination to return to Nicaragua.

No matter who may interfere, or what may be the form of interposition, whether it be legal or illegal, whether it be at home or abroad, armed or unarmed, he (Walker) is determined to renew prosecution of his unlawful design, and continue it to a successful end.<sup>30</sup>

And on his third and final return, on being captured by a British naval officer on September 3, 1860, his instructions to his men were that they were to claim the protection of United States citizens. For himself, however, when he presented his arms to his captor, he stated, "I am William

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<sup>29</sup>The Congressional Globe-The Debates, Proceedings, Laws, Etc. of the 1st and 2nd Sessions, Thirty-fifth Congress: City of Washington, John C. Rives, 1858, Vol. 27, Part One, p. 22., Jan. 7, 1858.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

Those who have relegated William Walker to the ranks of a filibuster, a power-crazed dictator, or a ruthless Caesar, must somehow have failed to evaluate his program of reform for Nicaragua. Both his domestic and foreign programs were sincere efforts to improve the position of his country. He made no secret of the fact that the Central American states should be united, for the flag of Nicaragua boasted five stars to symbolize the proposed union and bore the legend "Five or None." His real purpose was an empire in the tropics, with himself as the central figure.<sup>32</sup> Such a confederacy, he felt, would stabilize the national government and bring international prestige to Central America, replacing the five feeble governments which were pawns on an international chessboard. He and the emigrants who accompanied him would provide a vigorous new element to set things in order in a country which had demonstrated its inability to govern itself.<sup>33</sup> Wells expressed this hope:

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<sup>31</sup>Greene, op. cit., p. 325.

<sup>32</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>33</sup>Scroggs, op. cit., p. 396.

It is hoped and believed by the friends of these beautiful States that the mission of General Walker will be to finally reunite them in the form of a Federal Republic, and banish forever the fearful bloodshed and monarchy which have brought it to its present wretched condition.<sup>34</sup>

Most of all, the establishment and maintenance of peace was the prime requirement and if a leavening of California citizenry, hardy pioneers who had tamed a wilderness, were added, a decadent war-torn land might be turned into a lush garden of peace and prosperity, a veritable Eden. Certainly Walker's plan for a merger of the Central American countries to be guided and controlled by the expatriates was soundly applauded by large elements in the United States, though there were opposing groups as well. Senator Seward roundly castigated Walker and his followers for the "ashes and ruins of cities----made by our own marauding bands."<sup>35</sup>

Certainly Secretary of State Marcy had stoutly opposed every move made by Walker and called his exploits "robbery and murder."<sup>36</sup> The Nicaraguan minister, Parker French, a character of blemished reputation and devious dealings, had received a very chilly greeting from Secretary

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<sup>34</sup>Wells, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>35</sup>The Congressional Globe, p. 219.

<sup>36</sup>Scroggs, op. cit., p. 319.

Marcy, who had a great "facility of turning an unwelcome visitor into an icicle."<sup>37</sup> Marcy had often expressed his sympathies for the native Nicaraguans, and bemoaned the fact that a band of foreign adventurers had seized power and taken the birthright of the people. He consistently urged President Franklin Pierce against any form of connection with Walker and his regime. The Pierce cabinet had adopted this harsh attitude and had withdrawn the recognition extended by Wheeler. This group, it was said, had "a strong anti-filibustering complex" and Marcy, who was the chief exponent of this policy, grew rather touchy about the inability of port officials and other law officers to prevent recruits and material aid from reaching Walker.<sup>38</sup> The New York Herald, however, constantly urged recognition of Walker's government, as did many other papers of the day.

Walker's very nature imposed itself in causing his failure. Accustomed to command, he failed to recognize the stubborn resistance of the people he expected to govern. Very early in his military career, General Mario Mendez had offered Walker advice of which he took little notice.

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<sup>37</sup>Ivar Debenham Spencer, The Victor and the Spoils, (Providence, R. I.: Brown University Press, 1959), p. 360.

<sup>38</sup>Roy Franklin Nichols, Franklin Pierce, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1931, pp. 459-460.

"You will learn," he had said, "that Nicaraguans can be governed only with silver and the whip."<sup>39</sup> Already Walker had recognized the fact that there was much swindling among government officials.

The habit of cheating the State, prevailing in all parts of Central America, leads to the maladministration which produces revolution; and the habit of revolution in turn reacts and increases the disposition of officers to make as much as possible for themselves at public expense, since the tenure of their offices must, necessarily, be short. It is difficult to say which is cause and which effect; and it may be that they are both common effects of a radically bad social organization.<sup>40</sup>

Walker, with the burning zeal of an idealist, wanted to cure the ills of government and society through measures of reform and he wanted immediate action in this direction. Here, again, he failed to take human nature into account; he failed to recognize that the people he wanted to regenerate did not want to be regenerated. His puritanical upbringing never allowed him to participate in their pleasures; to him, their mirth and gaiety constituted a display of weakness. The average Nicaraguan was a man of many moods, volatile, explosive and all writers have endowed him with an inborn tendency to treachery.

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<sup>39</sup>Green, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>40</sup>Walker, War in Nicaragua, op. cit., p. 100.

The Spanish American is naturally warm-hearted, and if not crossed, of generous impulses. When he hates, he hates with all his might; he loves intensely. His spirits are at fever heat, or frozen with despair. He is a bundle of nerves strung to the fullest tension. Inevitably, however, there is treachery in his blood.<sup>41</sup>

These were the creatures, then, on whom Walker hoped to work his reforms; what he failed to realize was that such reforms would have to be forced down their reluctant throats. A nation so war-torn and revolution-drugged was not apt to adjust to a stern reform program such as that advocated by Walker. The decisive, quick orders delivered by a general to his troops were one thing; ultimatums to a reluctant citizenry were quite another.

Walker's difficulties as President were expressed in a column in his official newspaper directed to his American comrades-in-arms:

Soldiers:

Since you have been in Nicaragua, you have endured privations and passed through dangers, not only without murmuring, but even with cheerfulness. Veterans might be proud of the prowess you have exhibited; and patriots fighting for home and fireside have seldom shown more self-denial than you have in the service of a foreign government, and you have done all without as yet having received any compensation for what you have undergone.

It is true that the country has just emerged from a disastrous civil war, and therefore, we did not expect it to pay promptly the obligations

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<sup>41</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 42.

it had contracted; but we had a right to expect, at least, gratitude for our services. Far from receiving this, the late Provisional Government has attempted to excite the prejudices of the people against their true benefactors.

A government thus bankrupt in credit, faith, and honor has no title to the confidence or respect of brave soldiers.<sup>42</sup>

If Walker's purpose to establish a confederation of Central American states was his own immediate intention, this policy was open to question in the minds of politicians in the halls of the United States Congress, where the issue, involved as it was, not only became a bone of contention between pro-slavery and abolitionist groups, but also drew the personal ire of influential politicians. Rumor had it that a Colonel Kinney had private endorsement in high places for filibustering in Nicaragua, and he and Walker were very soon fiercely competitive. Cushing, Webster, Forney and others (some whispered the President himself) were interested in the promoter and had invested fairly extensively in the Kinney enterprises. When the expedition floundered, Walker unceremoniously, perhaps, and certainly undiplomatically, banished Colonel Kinney from Nicaragua, which action

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<sup>42</sup>E1 Nicaraguense (Walker's Nicaraguan Newspaper) June 20, 1856; reproduced in the Nashville Republican Banner of July 19, 1856. This is cited in an article which details Walker's reasons for desiring the Presidency of that country.

incurred wrath in high places for the tactless Nicaraguan president. Stephen A. Douglas had, on the other hand, openly sought recognition for the Walker regime, urging that success should be crowned. Not until the advent of Vijil as minister did Pierce soften in his attitude. This genteel, highly educated Latin was granted audience with the President, and in the succeeding months, respect between the two grew. On May 12, 1856, Pierce sent a message to Secretary of State Marcy, informing him that a presidential reception of the minister was forthcoming, with due recognition of his portfolio, and the Secretary was thus left gnashing his teeth in anger.<sup>43</sup>

William Walker, however, was not marked for easy success. The United States government, though it gave grudging recognition, never supported him. True, prominent politicians took an interest in his actions, but others fought him with equal vigor. Some captains of industry lined up on his side but the major-dome of them all fought him literally to the death. In a space of six months he had aroused against him every force that should have been fighting along with him.<sup>44</sup> Diplomacy was not an element of

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<sup>43</sup>Nichols, op. cit., pp. 460-463.

<sup>44</sup>Scroggs, op. cit., p. 396.

his character, and its lack proved his undoing. Lack of diplomacy in internal affairs of state and with the outside world was a major cause of his failure and it took him and those who followed him down to defeat and death. "Men like Walker have their faults, and these are accentuated when they fail; their virtues sink into the grave with them."<sup>45</sup>

Involvement of a political nature with forces outside Nicaragua seemed unavoidable; Walker's economic battle which wrecked him was wholly uncalled for, the result of financial scheming by his friends. If Walker was politically naive, he was economically ignorant, and the battle of Transit Rights pitted him against a free-booter of Goliath proportions. The multimillionaire, Cornelius Vanderbilt, pressured "King Pierce, the Irresolute," and his successor, "King Buchanan, the Unready" in his fight for control of the Isthmian Transit; when their actions were not as rapid as he wished, he resorted to skulduggery of his own.<sup>46</sup> For this titan of Wall Street was "an uncouth boatman, tobacco-chewing, ungrammatical, profane and the founder of a dynasty," and his rapacious greed knew no bounds.<sup>47</sup> In summing up the situation, Roache

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<sup>45</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>46</sup>Roche, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>47</sup>Greene, op. cit., p. 137.

Had Walker been a Conquistador he would have conquered Mexico as Cortez did. Had Cortez been a California filibuster, he might have conquered Nicaragua, but he would assuredly have succumbed to Marcy and Vanderbilt.<sup>48</sup>

Walker's annulment of the charter of the Accessory Transit Company, a shipping concern dominated by Cornelius Vanderbilt, brought these two principals into direct conflict. Vanderbilt enjoyed a monopoly of all the transportation business between California and the Atlantic states that went by way of Nicaragua. When Walker bestowed the former privileges and the confiscated property upon two of Vanderbilt's business rivals, Charles Morgan and Cornelius K. Garrison, the battle was joined. That Walker proceeded in this fashion was almost certainly the result of his loyalty to his friend, Edmund Randolph, who represented Morgan and Garrison. That Walker threw down the gauntlet to Vanderbilt, a man of terrible vindictiveness who had countless millions to spend to gain revenge, was the difference between success and failure for the Nicaraguan dream. The uneven fight found Vanderbilt further bloated with success and Walker's fortunes decimated.

Much has been written to the effect that William Walker was a superstitious and blind follower of destiny,

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<sup>48</sup>Roche, op. cit., p. 231.

one who believed in fate almost to the exclusion of reason and sanity. In the sense that Walker was a zealot, a dedicated man of purpose, and that his purpose was to govern Nicaragua and Central America in such a way as to bring this confederation to a position of honor in the family of nations, this statement is true. He moreover envisioned an empire embracing the islands of the Caribbean, and certainly included Cuba in his plans.<sup>49</sup> The scope of his dreams for Nicaragua was unlimited and if he saw himself in the perspective of lord of all he surveyed, he differed little from others who have moulded empires before and since. No member of the Falange denied that Walker held these dreams nor condemned him for such visions. Jamison never doubted that empire in the tropics with Walker as the central figure was the real purpose of his leader. He felt that such a project for a man of Walker's courage and indomitable will was wholly within reason and entirely feasible.

Had Walker been finally victorious in Nicaragua, there must have inevitably have followed quickly an absorption of the four other Central American States, culminating in a confederacy, with General

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<sup>49</sup>Scroggs, "William Walker's Designs on Cuba," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. I., No. 2, Sept., 1914, pp. 198-211.

Dreams of empire, then, were not out of vogue in the mid-nineteenth century, and if William Walker considered himself as one who purposed to acquire and govern such an area, he was not out of step with his age. The United States itself was subject to such dreams, and Manifest Destiny was the grandiose label attached to the acquisition of vast areas of loosely held lands. The spectre of nationalism and self-determination had not yet come to the fore in an area when men took, and were applauded for successful taking. William Walker, viewed from this angle, was one whose ambitions were in tune with the times.

Doubleday wrote:

Those, however, who see in the character of Colonel Walker the spirit of a mere buccaneer, fail utterly to comprehend his nature. His motive in seeking supreme power was not like Aaron Burr's; but rather like the first Napoleon, who indeed was his great exemplar, he conceived himself to be an instrument of destiny before whom all lesser influences must give way. This confidence in his destiny led him to disregard obstacles which might have deterred other men, and which in the end caused his downfall. A more conciliatory nature, one better adapted to conform to inevitable circumstances, joined with his splendid force of will and magnetism would have accomplished the difficult task he undertook.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>51</sup>Doubleday, op. cit., p. 107.

Walker, then, was not castigated for his belief in his destiny, but rather for not accommodating his destiny to fit circumstance and bring success. Walker's dedicated belief in his great purpose and his unwillingness to compromise, to settle for 'half the loaf,' dragged him down to utter failure. He had not cherished dreams of easy conquest; he had expected a difficult path which would be strewn with hardships. "He is but a blind leader of the past," he wrote, "who has not learned that Providence fits its agents for great designs by trials, and sufferings and persecutions."<sup>52</sup> That his whole being was dedicated to such a life, with the achievement of success as the anticipated conclusion, is a reasonable assumption. No blind belief in a destiny written in the stars characterized William Walker, but a lifetime of unstinting self-sacrifice, dedication and perseverance, it was hoped, might, in the end, lead to the fulfillment of purpose toward which he had ever moved. He had risked death a hundred times on the field of battle without fear or doubt; to his soldiers he was a hero upon whom the lightning of battle fell harmless.<sup>53</sup> It was not in keeping with the character of the man that he

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<sup>52</sup>Walker, War in Nicaragua, op. cit., p. 430.

<sup>53</sup>Jamison, op. cit., p. 57.

should bow the knee to lesser men or compromise; he would return with his shield or on it.

Perhaps at the very moment a fusillade of a hundred shots echoed in a tropic dawn, Edmund Randolph, miles away in San Francisco, was delivering an address celebrating the tenth anniversary of California's admission into the Union, which contained words almost prophetic. If he unwittingly chanted a requiem for his friend, William Walker, it was no less fitting:

You cannot tell today which pine sings the requiem of the pioneer. Some have fallen beneath their Country's flag; and longings unsatisfied have led some to renew their adventurous career upon foreign soils. Combating for strangers whose quarrels they espoused, they fell amid the jungles of the tropics and fatted the rank soil there with right precious blood. Or, upon the sands of accursed waste, they were bound and slaughtered by inhuman men, who lured them with promises and repaid their coming with a most cruel assassination.<sup>54</sup>

Not even in death did William Walker rest in his beloved Nicaragua; a shallow grave in Honduras served as his final resting place.

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<sup>54</sup>Scroggs, Filibusters and Financiers, op. cit., pp. 392-393.

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