

WILLIAM WALKER

Portrait by J. W. and E. L. Dodge, Nashville, Tennessee
Courtesy of Mrs. Charles P. Lockett, Louisville, Kentucky

1. Billy

William Walker's boyhood friends called him Billy.

Billy was born in Nashville, Tennessee on May 8, 1824, the eldest son of Mr. James Walker, a Scotsman who emigrated to the United States in 1820, and of his wife Mary Norvell, also of Scot descent. His father held a prominent position in the community, being the founder and President of the Commercial Insurance Company of Nashville. His mother is said to have been a very intelligent and well educated woman, but she was frequently ill: she suffered from consumption, which kept her at home and in bed for long periods.

As a boy, Billy was small for his years. With a freckled face, flaxen hair, and gray eyes, he was the puniest, quietest milksop of a boy. Always serious and taciturn, when he was compelled to reply, he answered in a drawling, nasal tone, although his expression of meekness attracted the attention of everyone who heard him. Billy was also studious; he always knew his lesson better than anyone else, but the moment school was over, he ran home to his mother.

Short, thin, and delicate, "like a girl," he was the spitting image of his mother. He passed most of early boyhood day close by her side, spending long hours reading aloud next to her bed. His favorite subject was history and his favorite character, Napoleon. Other boys made fun of him, calling him "book-worm," "honey," "missy," and similar contemptuous names.

Billy's precocious intellect, his dedication to books, and the constant tutoring of his mother made him a model student, enabling him to enter the University of Nashville at 13 years of age while all his classmates were 15 or older. Thereafter, two professors exerted special influence over him: Doctor Philip Lindsley, Presbyterian minister and President of the University, and Doctor Gerard Troost, a native of Holland with degrees from Amsterdam and Leyden. For a while, Billy's favorite pastime was reading the Bible, and it was thought that he would follow Dr. Lindsley's footsteps, but he soon began studying medicine instead.

He received his M.D. degree at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia on March 31, 1843, at age nineteen, and immediately sailed for Le Havre France to perfect his medical knowledge in the best centers of the world. From Paris, he wrote to his former classmate and intimate friend, John Berrien Lindsley, son of Dr. Philip Lindsley, expressing his surprise and shock in discovering moral laxness: "I am living in the Quartier Latin . . . here all students are of the same description . . . Most of them have mistresses, and nobody thinks them any the worse for it."

In the French capital, the puritanical boy from Nashville, "for the sake of studying the students at the Latin Quarter," visited with them at "La Chaumi re and such like places," and "put on a blouse at Paul Nicquet's with the Parisian thieves and chiffoniers." The experience left him with a bad opinion of Parisian "decadence." In his recollections, years later, Billy called Paris "the most farcical and yet the most disgusting city in Christendom." And he added: "Beneath the appearance of elegance and refinement, there lurks in this Parisian world, an amount of depraved taste and sensual vulgarity which chokes up the aspirations of the higher Art, and degrades men who might otherwise soar beyond the depressing influences of the world they live in."

But it was in Paris that Billy suddenly lost interest in his medical pursuits, abandoning

forever his medical career only a few months after arriving in Europe. In his subsequent letters to John from France, England, and Italy he was suddenly silent about the studies that had filled him with enthusiasm in his first letter, and he also ridiculed his colleagues. It was clear that he no longer thought of himself as physician.

As he told John, "With me, whilst a child and a boy, I had determined on a political career; there had been times when I thought that the last vestige of such an idea had disappeared, but often it reappears to me, in my waking dreams, leaving me uncertain whether it be an angel of light or an angel of darkness." But he was characteristically silent about his momentous decision and the circumstances surrounding it.

Billy's silence suggests that something happened in Paris that he found personally shameful, for there is some tension in his letters, even though he did not overtly mention it. His letters to John, for instance, are full of melancholy, expressing a need to share his personal doubts and conflicts with his friend:

"... There is no delight but one like the pouring out of the heart to a friend who can listen and sympathize and counsel.

"What a time it will be, John, when our lips 'touched with celestial fire' can tell what words of earth can ne'er convey! ...

"The more I think of the 'inner self' the more do I feel how much interest there would be in a complete history of all the revolutions in sentiment and principles which occur in a single human mind.

"When we look within and see the motions of our hearts, how strange do they seem! What an influence may the smallest circumstance have upon our whole being! The reading of a single sentence,—nay, the hearing of a single word may change the whole course of existence."

The question immediately arises: Which word changed Billy's life in Paris? Who uttered it? The answer came hidden in the double meaning of a very interesting poem on the Crucifixion which he sent to John from London on May 17, 1844, daring him "to find out the meaning ... the deep-hidden signification of this flight of my cropped-winged Muse." From its content, (analyzed in the unabridged version of this biography), it is obvious that Billy wrote the poem on the Crucifixion under the stimulus of Byron's "The Bride of Abydos," a story of incest.

These fragments of information suggest a logical and congruent hypothesis for Billy's sudden change in career. We know, for instance, that in the summer of 1843, he was 19 years old and "drinking at Paul Nicquet's" in Paris. Trying to learn of the boys, he probably tried to sleep with his first woman. But partly because of his puritan upbringing, at the crucial moment, he was unable to perform, paralyzed by seeing his

mother's face while looking at the girl's. Petrified by the terror of incest, insult is added to injury when the girl bursts out laughing at his impotence and hurls at him the appropriate French insult, somewhat stronger than the girl-boy of his childhood days. The tensions and revealing silences in his letters suggest a sexual crisis in Billy's life. He seems to have compensated for his loss of self-esteem by engaging in grandiose fantasies of power. Having decided to abandon the career of medicine because it lacked power and "height," he would eventually begin to put these fantasies into practice.

Billy subsequently spent two years of introspection and attentive observation of the social and political conditions of the Old World at a time when the Romantic Era was coming to a close, at the time when the glorification of human rights by liberal freethinkers was rapidly giving way to Nationalistic ideas that subordinate the individual to the interests of the State.

In Paris, he attended a Gregorian Mass at the Notre Dame Cathedral and heard the Marseillaise at Napoleon's Tomb in Les Invalides. He saw Auguste Comte soon after he published the last volume of his *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, and he walked the same streets as Karl Marx (who resided in the French capital when Billy was there.)

In Europe, Billy read Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, and listened attentively to the talk of imminent revolutions. He read Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham, Bacon and Aristotle, Shakespeare and Byron, and in Venice he stood where Byron had written *Manfred*. He admired Gothic cathedrals, Roman ruins, Classic sculptures, and Renaissance paintings: he was also enraptured by the Opera and moved by revolutionary ideals in Italy.

In 1845, at 21, Billy had studied and was perhaps fluent in four languages—English, French, German, and Italian, and had basic knowledge of Greek and Latin. In addition to the cultural and scientific foundations acquired in Nashville, Philadelphia, and Paris, he had assimilated in two years of travels forces and ideas that were inflaming the European world.

The acute psychological crisis that led him to abandon medicine had passed, but he remained preoccupied with grandiose fantasies of power. As he told John in his last letter from Europe: "The future! The future! Something always coming but never here." Consequently, when Billy returned home he announced to his parents his decision to become a lawyer—an important vocation for success in the political arena of the United States

2. Ellen

Billy studied law with preceptors, as was the custom at the time. He started his apprenticeship at the office of Edward & Andrew Ewing under the guidance of Judge Whitford in Nashville, but on December 1, 1845, he moved to New Orleans, then the largest metropolis south of Baltimore. Its one hundred thousand cosmopolitan residents and its location on the Mississippi delta made New Orleans the cultural mecca and commercial emporium of the South.

He lodged at the Planters' Hotel, but he soon moved to the home of a former classmate, Doctor Robert James Farquharson, who had graduated from the University of Nashville in 1841 and had received his M.D. at the University of Pennsylvania with Billy in 1843. The doctor had a high standing among the medical men in New Orleans and resided in an exclusive block of "Thirteen Houses" on Julia street.

At Farquharson's Billy met a neighbor who lived in another of the "Thirteen Houses," Ellen Galt Martin, 20 years old, pretty, intelligent, charming, well-educated and rich—but also a deaf mute. They saw each other frequently, and Martin family tradition vividly recounts that they soon became engaged. It is said that Ellen became "passionately attached" to Billy and he reciprocated: since she was a deaf-mute, he ran no risk of ever hearing girl-boy! from her lips. On April 26, 1846, hostilities broke out on the Rio Grande, commencing the war between the United States and Mexico. The first reports of fighting kindled a martial "epidemic insanity" in New Orleans. Volunteer regiments were rapidly organized and sent to the front. One of the first Louisiana volunteers was Charles Callahan, a young printer destined to lose his life at San Jacinto, Nicaragua ten years later, fighting for William Walker's cause.

Another volunteer was Doctor Farquharson. The first hero of the Rio Grande eulogized by the press was Captain Samuel H. Walker, "gallant Texan . . . as brave a man as ever breathed," but his namesake's heroism didn't seem to inspire Billy. On the contrary, bewitched by Ellen, he remained a stalwart pacifist amidst the martial frenzy that raged in the city. He registered his feelings in a June 4 letter to his friend, John Berrien Lindsley:

"Tennessee has, I suppose, the Texas or Mexico fever on her; the malady has abated considerably in this place; for a little time the patient was far gone in a delirium of joy and destructiveness. War was preached up as being the noblest and sublimest of all the states and conditions of men—a spectacle of delight for gods and demigods. Some of the

speechifiers seem to have taken their parts from the discourses of Milton's Moloch; only the terrible declamation which we fancy to belong to Moloch was dwarfed into mere twaddle about the irresistible power and incorruptible virtue of the American people.

"A Methodist preacher volunteered as Chaplain to one of the regiments; and on going to his Colonel in order to know how to equip himself, was quite surprised to hear that he was not to wear a sword and put on a coat with bright brass buttons. Some of the chaplains seem to think that the people in Mexico are Pagans; for they talk of planting the standard of the Cross amid the plains of the conquered country. I would sooner have expected to hear them talk of pulling down the Cross."

Deeply in love, Billy repudiated violence and scorned the martial fever of the time. He obviously didn't share the national obsession to conquer or "convert" other countries, the doctrine of manifest destiny that inspired the Mexican War drive and the filibustering expeditions against Cuba, Mexico, and Central America in the succeeding decade: "Our manifest destiny [is] to overspread and possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us."

Ironically, William Walker, the "king of the filibusters," conspicuously stands out as the living embodiment of that sentiment—a sentiment he rejected in 1846. In Nicaragua, in 1855, he would receive world attention and be dubbed The Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny because of his espousal of the Manifest-Destiny doctrine.

While dedicated to the study of law, Billy, in 1847, wrote a couple of articles for *The Commercial Review of the South and West*, a monthly journal founded and edited by J.D.B. De Bow. The Review aimed at promoting the development of the South, and it was the best of its kind in the decades before the Civil War. Billy, a fervent promoter of the journal, became a close friend of De Bow and collaborated with him, as assistant editor, to improve the publication. The leading New Orleans daily, the *Picayune*, noticed the change, commenting that the February issue of the Review "was better printed than ever" and the May issue, "extremely elegant."

On Monday, June 14, 1847, at the Supreme Court of Louisiana, Billy was examined in open Court and pronounced by the judges to be sufficiently qualified to practice as Attorney and Counsellor in the several Courts of the state. Billy then took the oath prescribed by law and was admitted by the Court accordingly.

But even as he began his career as a lawyer, he was already thinking of journalism. In September, in a letter to John, he wrote: "Wouldn't I be a fine fellow to follow after the army and give magnificent relations of its incomparable exploits?" His ironic reference to the army is consistent with the pacifist attitude that he had in June, 1846. Even if his

thought had been real and not merely in jest, his chances as a war correspondent were nil, for the military campaign had ended on September 14, 1847 with the conquest of the Mexican capital by the U.S. forces.

The war itself ended on February 2, 1848 when U.S. envoy Nicholas Trist and the Mexican commissioners signed a peace treaty at Guadalupe Hidalgo. By it, Mexico recognized the Texas border at the Rio Grande, and ceded New Mexico and Alta California to the United States in exchange for twenty million dollars.

While the whole country debated the merits of the document, Billy expressed his viewpoint (in March, 1848) in two articles titled "Hero Presidents" and "The Trist Treaty," published in the New Orleans Crescent newspaper. In those articles, he suddenly emerged as a supporter of Manifest Destiny and glorified the war hero, proclaiming the inevitable expansion of the United States and its piecemeal absorption of all Mexico. Indeed, the U.S. martial victories of the past two years had produced a radical change in his attitude. From an avowed pacifist, he suddenly championed American expansionism. Ellen's charm seemed to have abated.

In a letter to John a few days later, Billy explained the change as part of his renewed allegiance to the democratic party: "As to my going over to the democracy, you know it is but a return to old principles; and my faith in the old creed will be so much the stronger, as I have passed through the stage of skepticism, and am now more secure in my opinions than if I had adopted them as a matter of course."

That summer Billy visited his family and friends in Nashville. His presence added to his parents' happiness when another son, Lieut. Lipscomb Norvell Walker, returned after serving one year in Mexico in the Third Regiment of Tennessee Volunteers.

In Nashville, Billy saw his former schoolmates and also his old friends and instructors, Dr. Gerard Troost and Dr. Philip Lindsley, president of the University of Nashville. Impressed by his knowledge and eloquence, they invited Billy to deliver the Annual Address before the Alumni Society and he prepared an essay titled "The Unity of Art."

He delivered it on October 3 at 7:30 p.m. in the First Baptist Church, the best auditorium for a large audience in the city. Fifty years later, his cousin Mrs. Bryant vividly remembered that he surprised even his parents in his eloquent presentation: Dr. Philip Lindsley was dumbfounded by Billy's oratorical powers and declared that he was the greatest Nashville man ever graduated by the university. He characterized Billy's speech as truly marvelous. The alumni were so impressed that they asked Billy for a copy of the speech and published it.

The Unity of Art is a valuable synthesis of Billy's mind. It took him approximately one hour to unfold before the hometown audience his patriotic, Christian messages. His

concepts of Christianity and art stress a "higher purpose" that he would soon pursue:

"Man—a being of clay endowed with a soul . . . We begin to feel that all is made upon a plan . . . that there is a sentiment of love, as well as a reason in creation. . . The Christian God is a God of love, a God of Mercy, a God who sympathizes with us in our sufferings as well as in our successes . . . "Religion keeps alive the sacred flame of virtue that burns from age to age in the breasts of the great and the good. Art is one . . . The true, the beautiful and the good, are never found in opposition to each other, but are only different manifestations of the same divine spirit . . . The true life—the life of the spirit—the life spent in the pursuit of the true, the beautiful and the good, must be co-extensive and co-eternal with art . . . Eternal, then, as art itself, will be the pursuits in which the soul shall hereafter engage."

His patriotism flowed in words applauding republican political principles, in his praise of the Constitution, and in his support of the American conduct of the Mexican War. He presented patriotism as the "great and cardinal virtue," and elaborated:

"No matter how barren or rugged, how cold or repulsive may be the country which a man calls his own, still he must cling to it with an attachment that admits of no weariness, with a love that knows no ceasing. For this country of ours is intertwined with all the holiest and noblest feelings of our nature. With it are connected the joys of infancy and childhood, the pleasures of family and friendly intercourse, the delights of home, the recollections of a life spent in usefulness and for promotion of the welfare of our fellow-creatures: and it is in our native soil that we wish our bones to be laid when we have fulfilled the purposes of our being and attained the ends for which we were brought into existence."

Allied to patriotic sentiments, Billy reaffirmed his liberal creed when exalting the American form of government, "founded on the philanthropic principle that a man has a right to do whatever he pleases, provided he does not injure his neighbor," and also when advocating the economic thesis of self-interest advanced by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*—that "the gain of the individual is the gain of the community."

Billy considered poetry "the most universal of the Fine Arts." His acclaim for poetry and the poet, "who remains the same, whether he is savage or civilized," registered a thought expressed several months earlier in "Hero Presidents," that "man is the same in all his essential qualities—in the power of his reason and the vigor of his imagination—whether he struts in pantaloons or stalks in all the dignity and grace of primeval nakedness." But among the poets his favorite was Byron:

" . . . The name of Byron will be remembered as long as there is any sympathy for suffering genius, and the monument which he has erected to himself in his words and

in his works will out-last even the stately temple in which repose much of England's greatness and glory."

According to the Nashville Republican Banner, the allusions to European culture delighted the audience with "a subject so beautifully portrayed" and the number of "elegant illustrations used, being as original as the style was chaste and severe." His illustrations ran the gamut from Ancient Greece to current events—from Homer to Lamartine—saturating the audience of the First Baptist Church in Nashville with memories of his two years spent in Europe.

Neither in the speech or in his writings did Billy evince any enthusiasm for practicing law in New Orleans. He had become a lawyer so that he would have an entry into politics. He knew that a young attorney was not likely to acquire prominence and power in the forensic field, especially in Louisiana where old fogies held a monopoly, and police extortions and shady deals in court were common.

Billy's writing ability hence led him to journalism, and he soon had the opportunity in the Crescent when one of the owners, afflicted with a serious chronic illness, sold him his share. The new collective ownership, "J.H. Hayes & Co.—J.H. Hayes, J.C. Larue, S.F. Wilson and Wm. Walker," appeared on the masthead on March 7, 1849, and beginning on that date Billy imparted his typical philosophy and style to the paper as he took charge of the editorial page.

Forty-four articles bear his characteristic style in the first six weeks, in which he covered a wide variety of subjects, domestic and international. The expansion of slavery into the new territories captured the nation's attention in the spring of 1849, igniting passionate debates in Congress and seriously threatening to disrupt the national compact. Billy called attention to the danger, but emphasized the "Unionist Tendencies" counteracting it. He manifested his allegiance to the South and the slavery system. Yet, he opposed the extension of slavery into the newly acquired territories, considering it detrimental to authentic Southern interests:

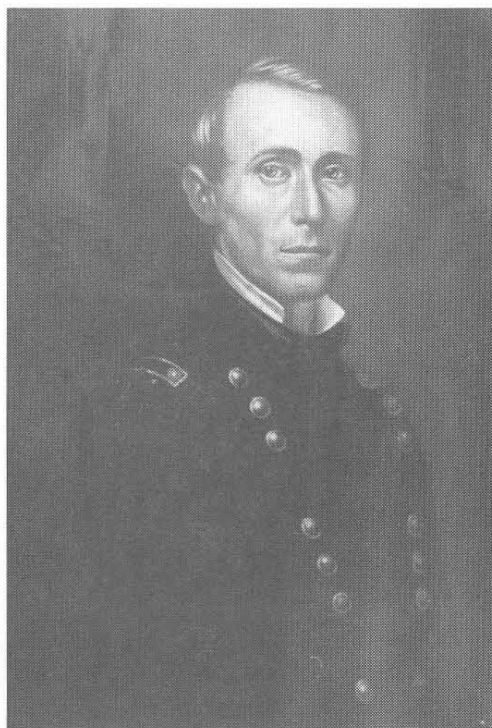
"Connected as we are with the South in all our nearest and dearest interests, bound to it by all the ties that link men with the country peculiarly their own, we cannot but look with displeasure on the attempt made to get up an agitation on the most exciting of all subjects. Such an agitation must end in discomfiture or disunion. We must, when the great question of slavery becomes the masterkey of political parties, either yield in despair or determine on independence and separate existence from the North. Our only object, consistent with reason, can be to preserve the slave property we possess. Like the dog in the fable, by snatching at the shadow in the water, we drop the substance which we once firmly held. Our safety is in silence: our policy 'in letting well enough alone.'"

He did, however, advocate the acquisition of Cuba by the United States. The island, which in 1849 remained a Spanish colony, had one million inhabitants, 60% of African origin, almost all slaves, and 40% of Iberian stock. Its annual yield of sugar, tobacco, coffee, and other agricultural products was said to surpass the fifty million dollar mark, which naturally attracted the attention of American entrepreneurs and Southern slave owners. Thus, according to Billy,

“Lying between the peninsulas of Florida and Yucatan, blocking up completely the entrance from the Atlantic Ocean into the Gulf of Mexico, this island may be made to control all the foreign commerce that leaves or enters the mouth of the Mississippi as well as of the ports of Texas, Alabama, and Florida, scattered along the Gulf. But in addition to the commanding position of Cuba, which may be seen by a glance at the map, the island has one of the finest harbors of the world. With stout hearts and scientific heads, the port of Havana would be hermetically sealed to an enemy’s vessel.” Commenting on the news from the Balkans, he portrayed Russia as “the great prophet and leader of absolutism,” predicting a U.S.-Russian rivalry for the Far Eastern trade. He advised building a railroad between the Mississippi valley and San Francisco. He urged “for the sake of the human race as for our own sake,” to “speedily build up a port in the Pacific that will make us the neighbors of Canton and Calcutta.”

In short, the pages of the *Crescent* reveal Billy deeply immersed in the political affairs of the day. He wrote on municipal finances and the cleanliness of the city, and on the national issues set in motion by the Gold Rush, the slavery controversy, and Manifest Destiny. He covered the revolutionary explosions in Europe, the forthcoming unification of Italy and Germany, the British in India, the awakening of Russia, and the expansion of Western commerce to the Far East. He also discussed navigation laws, the pay of American diplomats, and many other topics.

But for Billy the most important event was undoubtedly the epidemic of cholera which claimed thousands of lives in New Orleans early in 1849, for on April 18 it also claimed the life of his Ellen, the mute woman he had come to love.



GENERAL WILLIAM WALKER
Portrait courtesy of Latin American Library,
Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana

3. Walker

An acquaintance reported that Ellen, not being aware of the conventional social restraints stressing female decorum, became so passionately attached to Billy that she even displayed her affection in a more open manner than was pleasing to her friends. This led to some misunderstanding and estrangement Vnt which allegedly depressed her, “thinking herself deserted,” to the extreme that she “sickened and died.”

Billy was devastated by Ellen’s death, and in a series of articles in the Crescent he

surreptitiously recorded his mourning process. Various articles covertly but plainly told of Billy's own "secret thoughts and feelings" in "the critical circumstances that sometimes arise in the course of human events," when "the whole force of a great soul is elicited":

"... when the anxiety has reached that painful intensity which makes the heart almost cease to beat and palsies, if it does not entirely destroy the intellect—when the grief is of such power and strength that the world appears withered and the universe darkened—some other remedy, more violent than those addressed to the imagination, must be used. Then recourse must be had to those studies or pursuits which severely task the intellect and force the mind into action almost against its will. Hence, when stricken by the sharp agony that pierces instead of bruising—when overwhelmed by the anguish that annihilates every feeling but one—we fly for relief not to the poets that charm or the novelists that enliven; but plunging into the difficulties of science, that drag the intellect into the regions of abstract thought, we may possibly escape, by such means, the pangs which rend the heart in twain and devour the mind that permits itself to dwell upon them . . . When the strong soul suffers, it never spends the time in idle whining or complaint; and we see men of powerful passions, when overtaken by great suffering, throw themselves with tenfold ardor into the busiest and most exciting scenes around them. In the intensity of mental action they seek to drown the cries of the anguished soul. By the efforts they make to keep the mind employed you may perceive and measure the strength of their emotions. The pangs of passion are seen only in the spasms of the intellect."

Billy, in effect, followed his own advice, throwing himself into the editorial tasks of the paper. During the succeeding weeks, his prolific pen incessantly recorded his "spasms of the intellect." In May, the Mississippi river followed a traditional springtime practice and flooded parts of the city. On May 15 it overflowed the Protestant Cemetery on Girod street, where Ellen was buried, forcing the undertakers to float about the paths, rowing coffins on skiffs to bury the dead. On May 18—one month, to the day, after her death—Walker visited Ellen's grave, and next morning he poured his heart out on the editorial page of the *Crescent*:

"OVERFLOW OF THE CEMETERIES.—The water comes on, and covers the houses of the dead as well as those of the living . . . the ripple of the waves, as stirred by the breeze, seems like the nurse's lullaby to make the slumber of earth's children more profound and dreamless. The wide expanse of waters around the graves of the departed, images the eternity to which the dead are gone, and we feel more the desolation of the grave as we view the tombs surrounded by the barren waters. . . . The invading water, while it

brings into the burying grounds the animals that prey upon and devour one another, chokes also the lives of the lowly plants that gather about the habitations of the dead. The flowerets can get no air when the river flows over them; and like the gentle maiden over whose grave mayhaps they dwell, they wither and softly sigh away the life that but a little while ago seemed so bright and beautiful."

Together with his grief, a remarkable change occurred in Billy's articles as he suddenly became a crusading journalist, "a dauntless, uncompromising opponent of wrong and injustice in every shape and under every form." On April 20, in the wake of Ellen's funeral, he launched an assault against Colonel T.F. Johnson, Superintendent of the Western Military Institute at Georgetown, Kentucky, who had arrived in New Orleans to establish another military academy. When the *Picayune* defended Johnson, Billy also attacked the *Picayune*.

Before that quarrel was over, he had started another, criticizing the appointment of a new State Engineer. Next, he assailed the Board of Health for "masterly inactivity," accusing it of having done nothing more than count corpses during the cholera epidemic.

In a single day (May 28), Billy directed his hostility against the State Engineer, West Point officers, Board of Health physicians, Wall Street bankers, Lombard Street brokers, Bishopgate stockjobbers, Manchester mill-owners, and Liverpool traders. Other targets in May included Captain Forno of the Police Department, Governor Johnson of Louisiana, several fellow journalists, an actor on the stage, and other persons of lesser magnitude.

Before long, he had embroiled the *Crescent* in angry polemics with the *Picayune*, the *Bulletin*, the *Delta*, the *Courier*, the *Bee-Abeille*, and *La Patria*, that is to say, with practically all the papers published in New Orleans. His assault on *La Patria* editor E.J. Gómez literally became physical when Billy, announcing his intention of chastising his colleague, proceeded to his office and smacked him with a cane. Bystanders then seized both men just in time to save Billy's life, as an enraged Gómez pulled a pistol and was ready to shoot him.

Billy's sudden transformation, from the "sickly, studious milksop" to the "stern and daring adventurer" who became the William Walker known to history, was recorded in the *Crescent* in a series of psychological articles which he wrote in August, 1849 under the cover of "Sketches of Prominent Citizens." By means of dissociated personalities of his own invention, whom he named John Smith, John Brown, James Jenkins, John Jones, Peter Muggins, Gabriel Gumbo, Dick Dobs, and Timothy Tucker, Billy surreptitiously described the "conflict without parallel in history" in which Gumbo, "a

mountain of wisdom . . . versed in all the deep workings of the human heart,” defeated Mary Muggins’ husband, Peter, and took control of his psyche.

In my interpretation, Gabriel Gumbo, the master politician, and his two assistants, Dick Dobs the military genius and Timothy Tucker the writer, personified the new Walker in the sketches.

During the next two days, the new Walker surfaced in the editorial page under cover of Billy’s comments on the leaders of the revolution in Hungary, announcing the “birth” of the Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny:

“Unless a man believes that there is something great for him to do, he can do nothing great. Hence so many of the captains and reformers of the world have relied upon 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 the instant. It is natural for a man so possessed to conceive that he is a special agent for working out into practice the thought that has been revealed to him. To him alone are known all the great consequences that are to flow from the principle he has discovered. To his hand alone can be confided the execution of the great plan that lies perfected in no brain but his. Why should such a revelation be made to him—why should he be enabled to perceive what is hidden to others—if not that he should carry it into practice?”

August 29, 1849 marked the birth of the future filibuster. The Hungarians, struggling for liberty, inspired and midwived him on that date in the Crescent. Other events helped create the idea that suddenly sprang up in Walker’s soul. Chief among them, the gold rush to California, which drew Billy’s attention to the Tehuantepec route and made him daydream about a tropic empire:

“[Tehuantepec’s] termination is in the Gulf of Mexico, which is practically an island sea of the continent, and from which, before many years, all European dominion will be excluded. More than half of its shores are now American and American influence can be made potent over the shores of Mexico and Yucatan. The island of Cuba once ours, and a few years will see that most desirable consummation, and the Gulf of Mexico will be as fully national, with us, as Lake Michigan. . . . By this route we shall have control of the approaches, and be instrumental in extending the political influences of our own example along a new and interesting country, and creating states contiguous to our own, to be assimilated to, and finally blended with, our own system.”

And, for Walker, that tropic empire meant a Southern, slave empire:

“ . . . Statesmen have discovered that the Mississippi river is the great centre of the American confederacy—that the Father of Waters is the band of steel that fastens together all the States of the Union. And it is in the valley of the great river that is

springing up the most perfect and the most powerful civilization the world has ever seen. . . The valley of the Mississippi—must, for geographical as well as social reasons, have more influence than other portions over the future civilization of the hemisphere; and analogy would lead us to suppose that the southern part of the valley will have a principal share in moulding the habits and opinions of the rest. The influence of New Orleans over the western country is already perceptible, and is destined to be much greater hereafter; and as Athens moulded Greece and Greece Europe, so this city will influence the West and through it the whole American continent.”

Walker commenced to put his plan in practice immediately. On October 3, his name appeared in the *Crescent* among the signers of a Special Notice for a Meeting of the Citizens of Louisiana favorable to the Tehuantepec Route. He and his friends John C. Larue and J.D.B. De Bow were among the twelve delegates that on the evening of October 17 sailed upriver to represent Louisiana and plead the case for Tehuantepec at a Memphis Convention later that month.

Delegates from other states favored different routes at the Convention. Walker's editorial correspondence from Memphis filled several columns with detailed accounts of the discussions and resolutions. The Tehuantepec plan, however, gained no supporters, and he returned to New Orleans, dejected.

As 1849 drew to a close, Walker surreptitiously recorded his disappointment in his “New Year's Day” editorial on January 1, 1850:

“Eighteen Hundred and Forty-nine came in with such bright prospects and flattering hopes—it vanishes with so many darkening shadows and chilled aspirations . . . A few short months have witnessed the subjugation of Italy and the fall of Hungary . . . For a while all went well, and Liberty seemed, like the vine and the fig-tree, to flourish and expand beneath a Southern sun. But there came a blast from the North, and all the fair flowers of Freedom were blighted and destroyed . . . The sixth trump has sounded; may the seventh soon be heard, and open to us ‘a new heaven and a new earth.’ It is towards the West that the New Year looks with a cheerful soul and a hopeful spirit. The star that guided the Eastern magians to the manger of Bethlehem rose in the East, and moved before until it stood where the young child was. In these latter days, there has appeared in the West a Constellation of States that seem destined to lead man on to the highest condition of liberty and civilization of which he is capable. Let the Eastern sages follow the Western stars, and the hopes of the Present may become the realities of the Future.” On February 1, 1850, Walker and his partners sold the *Crescent* to new owners, and shortly afterwards (in June) he left for California.

4. California

Walker traveled to California by way of Panama. He left New Orleans aboard the 2,500 ton steamer Ohio on Saturday, June 15, 1850. On Monday afternoon, he arrived in Havana, and spent two full days and three nights on Cuban soil before embarking aboard the steamer Georgia for Chagres. He crossed the Isthmus on a native canoe, or perhaps on the Ralph Rivas, a 100-ton steamboat on its third trip up the Chagres river, and then on horseback to Panama City. Finally, on the steamer Oregon, after steering at Acapulco for coal, he arrived in San Francisco on Sunday evening, July 21.

He planned to join his former partner in the Crescent, A.H. Hayes, who had travelled ahead of him to start a new paper in San Francisco. Hayes was reputed to be one of the best practical printers in the United States, but he was nowhere to be seen, for as soon as he arrived in California he was seized with "gold fever" and left for the mines in search of fortune.

Hayes' departure forced William Walker to change plans. He turned for help to Edmund Randolph, a New Orleans lawyer-friend who had arrived in San Francisco a year earlier and by then had a lucrative practice. Edmund belonged to one of America's greatest families, the Randolphs of Virginia, which produced such powerful leaders as Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, and Robert E. Lee.

With Randolph's help, Walker began to earn a living in San Francisco as a lawyer, which he used as a tool to enter the political arena. In September, he placed his name on the ballot for Member of the Assembly in the forthcoming elections, but was immediately disqualified by the California Constitution which required candidates for the Assembly or Senate to have resided in the State for one year before being eligible.

Walker then worked full time as a journalist, employed as assistant editor of the San Francisco Herald, a paper that Randolph had founded in partnership with John Nugent, formerly a reporter for the New York Herald. When Randolph retired from the paper, Nugent became sole proprietor with the financial backing of landowner-capitalist Joseph Folsom. As soon as Walker started his editorial functions, he engaged in the crusading journalism which had embroiled him in controversy in New Orleans.

Disputes over land titles involving Folsom furnished Walker ideal targets on which to vent his hostility. It all started when County Judge Roderick N. Morrison declared a Folsom title illegal; Public Administrator Joseph Henriquez instituted suit for the

property, and his attorney told Folsom that a \$20,000 bribe would guarantee from Judge Morrison a new ruling in his favor. Morrison was then indicted for malfeasance but was acquitted by Judge Levi Parsons in the District Court. Thereafter, Morrison, Henriquez, and Parsons, were constantly criticized by Walker in the Herald.

An employee of Morrison, a rash young Philadelphian named William Hicks Graham, sent Walker a note containing the most abusive and insulting language; consequently, Walker challenged him, and on January 12, 1851 they met in a clearing off the Mission road on the outskirts of San Francisco. The terms: Holding Colt's revolvers at ten paces, the men were to advance one step after each shot, unless one of the parties was hit before.

Two shots were exchanged, but Walker missed both. Graham's first shot passed through the left leg of Walker's pants, slightly breaking the skin, and the second ripped through the fleshy part of the thigh, causing Walker to fall. The wound, though severe, was not considered dangerous. The press reported that the parties then left the ground and returned to the city: both showed themselves men of coolness, courage, and nerve.

Walker didn't learn his lesson, however, and continued his attacks on the judges; indeed, after any petty crime that been committed, he incited people to take the matter into their own hands:

"Let us then organize a band of two or three hundred 'regulators,' composed of such men as have a stake in the town, and who are interested in the welfare of this community. The very existence of such a band would terrify evildoers and drive the criminals from the city. If two or three of these robbers and burglars were caught and treated to 'Lynch law,' their fellows would be more careful about future depredations."

Walker's prescription on how to stop crime, preached repeatedly from the pages of the Herald, would soon give rise to the infamous San Francisco Vigilantes. And his renewed attacks on Judge Parsons finally led the judge to summon him for Contempt of Court.

The Contempt Case was taken up on Saturday, March 8. Walker appeared with his counsel, Messrs. Edmund Randolph and Charles T. Botts. They argued at length, to no avail. Judge Parsons found Walker guilty of contempt, imposed a fine of \$500, and ordered him held in close confinement until he paid.

According to the Herald, during the afternoon, when the imprisonment of Walker became generally known, every one in the streets seemed to talk angrily of nothing else. On Sunday morning, about 4,000 people assembled at the Plaza; speeches and resolutions condemning Judge Parsons followed, the crowd then moved to the front of the District Court, calling for Walker, and greeted him with loud cheers when he appeared in the window of the second story.

Walker addressed the people in a few words, thanking them for their sympathy, and stressing that it was not so much the individual in whom they were interested as the maintenance of a great principle outraged in his person. He appealed the decision of the Judge to the decision of the People. The crowd gave three cheers for Walker followed by three groans for Judge Parsons, and then dispersed.

On Monday morning, Walker's lawyers presented a writ of habeas corpus at the Superior Court, to secure his liberty. The case dragged on for several days, filled with interminable legal wranglings, but finally leading to a split decision of the Court in Walker's favor. After he was released from custody on Saturday, March 15, he addressed a Memorial to the Assembly at San Jose for an impeachment of Judge Parsons, and personally pled his case on the floor of the House of Assembly on April 22d.

Trying to capitalize on public sentiment in his favor in San Francisco, Walker secured the nomination as Democratic candidate for Alderman in the Fourth Ward. He enjoyed a fleeting moment of glory at the Grand Ratification meeting of the Democracy in the evening of April 24th, when he was greeted with three tremendous cheers and made another speech. But his change of fortune quickly changed again.

On April 22, by a final vote of 17 to 12, the Assembly resolved that the evidence did not sustain Walker's charges against Judge Parsons to warrant an impeachment in any respect.

On April 28, election day, in the 4th Ward, C.M.K. Paulison, a Whig, defeated Walker by a 432 to 280 vote margin.

On May 3, large portions of San Francisco were destroyed by fire. The burnt district extended about three fourths of a mile from north to south, one third of a mile from east to west, including eighteen entire blocks and parts of six others. Every newspaper office in the city, except the *Alta*, was destroyed. Nugent saved a portion of his materials, but Walker lost his job in the *Herald*, effective at the end of the month.

Then on May 17, final judgment on the \$500 fine at the District Court forced Walker to pay \$886 including law costs.

Down on his luck, Walker left town to earn a living as a lawyer in Marysville, the county seat of Yuba, in the center of the Sacramento valley, 42 miles north of Sacramento. The District Court, the County Court, and the Court of Sessions met in town; the gold rush and the frontier provided the bulk of his legal practice.

On June 3, 1851, he appeared for the first time at the District Court as attorney for George Hanson in an application for a writ of injunction to restrain William S. Webb from running a ferry across Feather river near Yuba City. Thereafter, lawyer William Walker handled one grand larceny case, many mining claims, divorce cases, nuisances

and misdemeanors, fines for damages, and sundry drudgery in the Marysville courts for months on end.

Strongly influenced by Walker's campaign in the Herald, the Legislature (in April, 1851) had amended the State criminal law, declaring robbery and grand larceny punishable by death, at the discretion of the jury. It was ironic that lawyer William Walker would be the first one in California to lose a case and a client to the criminal provision that he himself, as a journalist, had helped create. The unlucky victim was George Tanner, alias Tom Twigg.

Tanner was a teamster who hauled merchandise to the diggings on the Yuba. On March 19, 1852, he was found hauling a sack of potatoes stolen from a merchant. A search of his home uncovered additional goods, allegedly stolen.

The case of *The People vs. George Tanner*, for Grand Larceny, came before the Court of Sessions on April 12. Tanner appeared in Court with Walker, who fought a losing battle after the jurors were impanelled and those who had qualms about condemning a man to death for the crime of grand larceny were excused from serving. During the ensuing weeks, Walker's objections were repeatedly overruled by the Judge, and his arguments failed to convince the Jury.

On April 19, Tanner was found guilty of grand larceny and condemned to death. Next, the Yuba County District Court and the California Supreme Court confirmed the sentence. Execution was stayed when Walker requested a re-hearing. He argued that the trial was vitiated because the State had no right to inquire beforehand how a juror would exercise his discretion of punishing the offence of grand larceny with death. After interminable arguments and delays, the Supreme Court overruled Walker's objections and ordered that Tanner be executed as prescribed in the original sentence.

Tanner was hung on July 23, 1852. A guard of seventy-five citizen police, heavily armed, escorted him from his cell. He was ghastly pale, and so overcome with fear, that he could not stand alone. He had to be placed on the trap door and supported until the fatal bolt was drawn, which left him dangling in mid air. He fell about five feet and died quickly.

George Tanner, who protested his innocence to the very end and refused to confess to any crimes, was the first victim of the California law that made robbery punishable by death. On the day of the execution, a petition signed by the city's most respectable citizens was presented to the Common Council, asking them not to permit the body of Tanner to be buried in the city cemetery. The request of the petitioners was immediately granted, and pressed for time, the sexton was forced to bury the body in a hastily prepared grave outside the cemetery.

Next evening, two men were arrested in the act of desecrating the remains, giving rise to humorous newspaper accounts about the body of Tanner being resurrected on Saturday night. As the grave had been uncovered, the sexton brought the coffin to town and on Sunday morning buried it near Tanner's widow; so that she could watch over her husband's remains.

Such righteous cruelty lavished upon Tanner, whose crimes, if any, consisted in stealing a few sacks of potatoes, mackerel, and barley, contrasts with the absence of any punishment for those who massacred entire communities of Indians. During Tanner's trial in April, for instance, the California press chronicled the ghastly details of a Klamath Indian massacre: Forty Indians killed—two white men wounded! And while Tanner, in irons, sweated out Walker's appeal to the Supreme Court, on May 4, 1852, California newspapers chronicled another wholesale slaughter of Indians—150 men, women, and children killed in Shasta county—in retribution for the murder of one white man.

Such atrocities, of course, were not investigated, much less punished, by the authorities. Concerning the consensus of public opinion in "civilized, Christian" California, John Nugent's comment in the San Francisco Herald may serve as example: "The sending of a hundred and fifty fellow creatures suddenly into eternity—Indians though they were—involves a great responsibility, which it is to be hoped was not needlessly incurred."

The moral discrepancy between the hanging of a looter and the impunity to massacre 150 Indians reflects the distorted values that reigned in California in the wake of the Anglo-Saxon conquest—values that would ironically guide the actions and decisions of Walker and his men during their forthcoming filibustering forays into Mexico and Nicaragua.

One of Walker's colleagues at the Bar in Marysville was Stephen Johnson Field, from New York, who would soon become a California Supreme Court Justice and afterwards, for thirty-five years, Associate Justice at the United States Supreme Court. In his memoirs, towards the end of the century, Justice Fields wrote that Walker "was a brilliant speaker, and possessed a sharp but not very profound intellect. He often perplexed both court and jury with his subtleties, but seldom convinced either."

Notwithstanding Justice Field's assertion, the judicial registers indicate that Walker managed to convince court and jury more often than not. An exact tally is impossible because the eighteen bound volumes of legal records of the period list many lawsuits without specifying the contending lawyers. Of the fifty-seven cases in which William Walker's name is mentioned, however, he won twenty-four and lost sixteen while three

were continued by other attorneys after his departure from Marysville, eleven were settled out of court, and in three the result could not be ascertained from the available documents.

At the beginning, Walker worked in partnership with J.W. McCorkle, Stephen Johnson Field, or others; but later his associate was almost invariably Henry P. Watkins. Walker's record was outstanding in the eleven cases in which he worked alone: winning eight, losing two, and settling one out of court.

Throughout this period, Walker naturally used his legal training to advance his political agenda. In October, 1851, he was in charge of presenting fellow democrat G.M. Mott's case for the contested Judgeship of the Tenth Judicial District. In January, 1852, he appeared in Sacramento, as counsel for Mr. McCann, democrat, in a contest with Mr. Cook, whig, each claiming to be the legally elected representative from Yuba county.

A month later, he was the Marysville delegate at the Democratic State Convention in Sacramento. In May, 1852, the *Alta* mentioned him as a likely democratic candidate for the U.S. Congress. In July, he was the Yuba delegate to the Democratic State Convention in Benicia, but, contrary to expectations, he was not nominated for Congress or any other office in Yuba county in 1852.

Instead, in October he was elected Chairman of the Democratic Nominating Committee for the 6th Ward in San Francisco. He was appointed Sergeant-at-Arms and intervened actively in the County Convention for the nomination of local candidates to the November polls. Then he returned again to his judicial labors in Marysville. There, according to one contemporary, "where the inhabitants were noted for their hospitality and genial dispositions, Walker always maintained a stolid indifference for those around him, and confided in no man."

Despite Walker's stolid indifference for those around him, the great idea that firmly shook his whole being in 1849 in New Orleans, was transmitted to his partner Henry P. Watkins in Marysville. The result was an expedition to Lower California and Sonora in 1853-54. The initial spark was ignited when the first and last person Walker ever loved died: his mother was buried in Nashville on January 8, 1852.