Part One: BILLY

In beginning the life story of my hero, Alexey Fyodorovich Karamazov . . . One thing, I dare say, is fairly certain: this man is odd, even eccentric. . . . it happens sometimes that such a person, I dare say, carries within himself the very heart of the universal.

Fyodor Dostoevsky. *The Brothers Karamazov.*

WILLIAM WALKER

1. Mama's Boy

William Walker's boyhood friends called him "Billy."[1] Billy's father, Mr. James Walker, emigrated from Glasgow, Scotland to the United States in 1820, in company of his brother Robert and a sister named Janet. Robert had inherited a piece of property in Nashville at the death of an uncle in 1815, and the newcomers took advantage of the boom brought to the region by the opening of steamboat traffic along the Cumberland river. Nashville, a river port, rapidly doubled its population to 6,000, entering an era of growth and expansion that made it the commercial and cultural center of Tennessee.

Two years after his arrival, James Walker already owned a farm of 752 acres next to Indian Creek in Shelby county. In 1825 he bought a city lot for $1,400, built a house, and sold it for $7,400 four years later. With ability and dedication, he ascended to a prominent social and economic position in the community. In 1835 he helped found the *Commercial Insurance Company of Nashville*, of which he was the first Secretary, and later its President.

Billy's mother was Mary Norvell, also of Scot descent and a native of Glasgow, Kentucky. Her father, Lipscomb Norvell, son of James Norvell from Albemarle county, Virginia, had gained Revolutionary fame during the War of Independence. Four of his nine boys also fought in that conflict, and two of them were killed by the enemy. One of the youngest, Hendrick, joined the Navy with the rank of midshipman in 1828.

Two of Mary's brothers, Moses and Joseph, became bankers and journalists; in 1812 they founded the *Nashville Whig*. Joseph was elected Mayor of the city and held a high rank as

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[1] His Nashville friends still called him Billy in 1850, when he moved to California. For that reason, we will call him Billy up to the great change in his character which occurred around that time.

Freemason. By 1825, Mary's father and several of her brothers resided in Nashville.

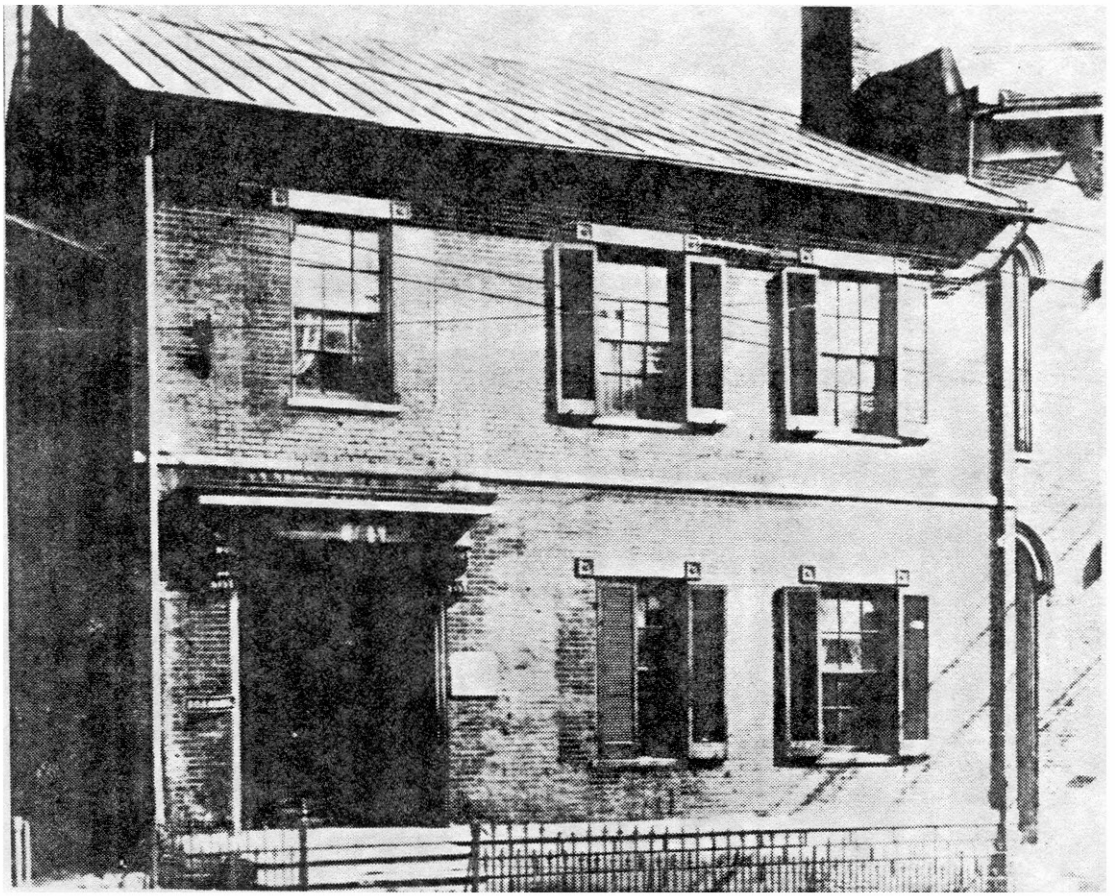
James Walker and Mary Norvell were married at the First Baptist Church of Nashville on August 7, 1823. Their firstborn, William, arrived exactly nine months later, on May 8, 1824. Lipscomb Norvell (1826) and James (1828) followed, and then a girl, Alice, in 1831. Another child, Joseph, born in 1836, died soon after birth.

The Walker home was on High Street, between Union and Church, but in 1840 the family moved to 21 South Cherry Street, when Mr. Walker acquired that property. Both houses were similar two story buildings, built of red brick. A narrow passageway at the side of the house led to a side entrance and a closed-in porch, where there were pegs on which the children were required to hang their school wraps, hats and books when they came home. There was a servants house in the backyard.

Across the street on South Cherry was the residence of Dr. Felix Robertson, son of James Robertson, celebrated Nashville pioneer. The doctor and Billy's father were intimate friends, and visited each other almost every night. The doctor's calls were also of a professional nature, as Mrs. Walker was frequently ill. She suffered from consumption, which kept her at home and at bed rest for long periods.

Mrs. Walker is said to have been a very intelligent and well educated woman. Many years after her death, a niece recalled that Billy, as a child, used to spend long hours reading aloud next to his mother's bed. His favorite subject was history and his favorite character, Napoleon. Billy took advantage of every opportunity to accompany and entertain his mother, while she helped him with his studies and homework.

Other boys made fun of him, calling him "book-worm," "girl-boy," and similar epithets when he refused to go play with them. Short, thin, and delicate, "like a girl," Billy was the spitting image of his mother. He was like his mother



THE WALKER RESIDENCE
21 South Cherry Street, Nashville

in everything, while his brothers resembled their father: "They were men of the world, and he was essentially a moral man."[2]

One of his boyhood friends, J. W. Bradford, years later described Billy thus:

> We were both born in the city of Nashville, Tenn., attended the same schools, and were almost daily associates in the careless period of boyhood. My acquaintance began with him in the preparatory department of the English school of Alexander Litton. . . .
>
> I will describe him as he was at school. As a boy he was small for his years, nor has his manhood proved recreant to his youthful physique. He is a small man. A freckled face, almost flaxen hair, and eyes that reminded one of blue only —for they are gray —make up the appearance of his head and face.
>
> He was always of a grave turn, never talkative, and when spoken to, answering in a drawling, nasal tone, but with an expression of meekness that always attracted my attention and the attention of nearly every one who heard him. His voice had another peculiarity; there was a softness, a sort of undulatory sound that came upon the ear with something of pathos — something of melancholy — yet entirely natural. It made me think of sadness without becoming so; and I have often looked at him and wondered how his tones could be so inexpressibly peculiar and touching at his tender age, and yet be natural. Seven or eight years ago, when I saw him last, they were the same essentially.
>
> He was always affectionate, and none in school was more ready to oblige his fellow with aid in a

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2T.I.R. Carter, "Home Life of General William Walker," *Nashville American* 11/29/1904, (clipping at the Tennessee State Library and Archives).

BILLY'S SISTER, ALICE

"hard sum," or help to master the difficulties in an "awful lesson" — "Billy," as we called him, was scarcely ever wanting at an hour of recitation with a prompt and correct answer, and when he missed, as was sometimes the case, his mortification melted into tears, and this so touched the heart of our good "master," that once our class has been indebted to Billy's sensitiveness in getting home to dinner at the regular hour.

I never saw him lively in my life —that is, I never heard him laugh out loud, as boys do at play. To be sure, he sometimes engaged in the usual school-boy sports, and his voice was heard in "Anthony over!" or "prison bars," but it was always in that oldish sort of tone that made one think of an old body.

His mother was one of those gentle, affectionate, ever-loving beings that the great God's good wisdom sometimes blesses this sin-struck earth withal, and almost entirely with her were Wm. Walker's earliest boyhood days passed. She was a sufferer for many years, and William being the oldest of four children was consequently the mother's reliance, and to a great extent supplied the place of a daughter — hence, the almost feminine quality or feature of his disposition, and the affectionate temper so noticeable in him.

In due course of time, the good Master Litton was parted with for the more recondite studies and buried languages of the college, and soon after this change, another came upon Billy. He became a Christian youth, and pursued this high calling with all of a "zeal according to knowledge," and soon became as proficient in the Christian law, and honest in its walk, as he has already shown himself determined in the spread of American principles of government.

A visit to Europe, however, interfered to check

> the tendency to the ministry his life at this time evidently showed, and an absence of two years or more, principally in Paris, where he studied law and physics, entirely changed his views on life.[3]

As to his family's religious affiliation, they had joined the Disciples of Christ, a protestant denomination that adhered to the doctrines of Alexander Campbell, heavily influenced by the empirical philosophy of John Locke. The Disciples stressed the Bible as sole fountain for rules and precepts. They were strict in practice, making life hard for children. The situation in Billy's home was aggravated by both parents being "of strong and somewhat stern character"; Billy, however, "loved his father dearly. No harsh words ever passed between them."[4]

Billy's precocious intellect, his dedication to books, and the constant tutoring of his mother made him a model student. His precocity can be seen in a letter he wrote at the age of 6, reproduced here on page 258. It is confirmed by the fact that he entered the University of Nashville on May 15, 1837, at exactly 13 years of age, while all his classmates were 15 or older.

The university offered a uniform plan of studies, which in four years covered the following subjects: Algebra, Elements of Geometry, Plane and Spherical Trigonometry, Descriptive Geometry, Conic Sections, Analytical Geometry, Differential and Integral Calculus, Mensuration, Surveying, Navigation, Mechanics, Astronomy, Chemistry, Mineralogy and Geology, Experimental Philosophy, Natural History, Roman and Grecian Antiquities, Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres, History and Chronology, the Greek and Latin Classics, Moral Philosophy, Logic, Political Economy, Philosophy of Mind, the Principles of Natural and Political Law, Composition, Oratory, Criticism, Natural Theology, Evidences of the Christian Religion, and the Holy Scriptures.

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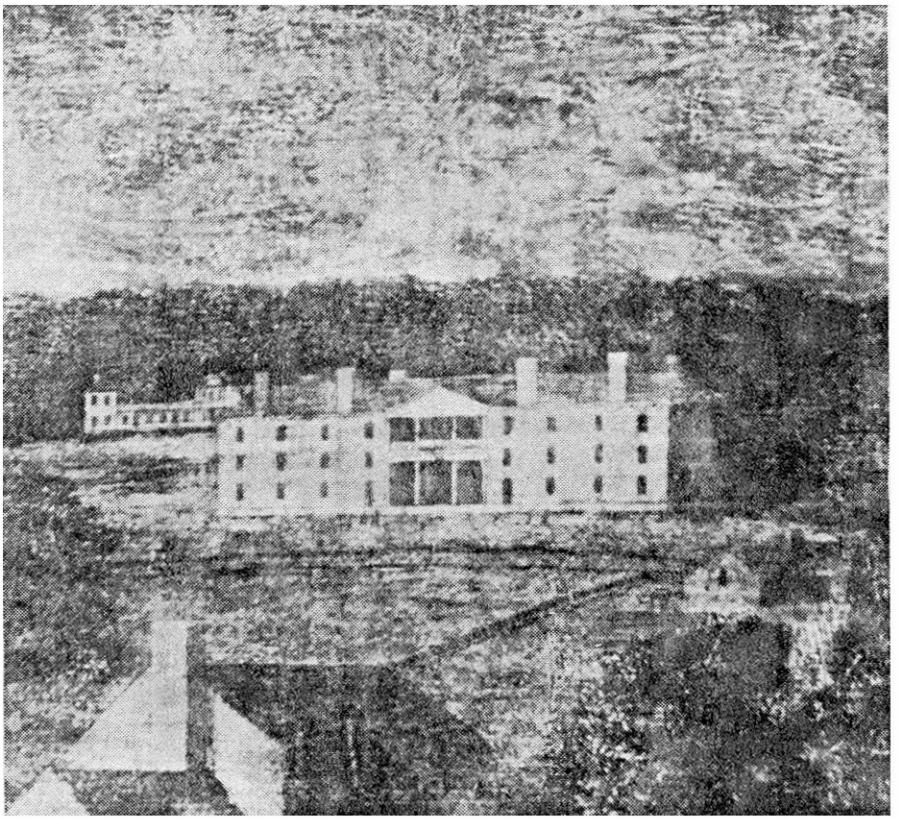
[3]J. W. Bradford, "William Walker," *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), 8/6/1856, p.1, c.4.

[4]Carter, *Op. Cit.*



THE UNIVERSITY OF NASHVILLE THAT WALKER ATTENDED IN 1837

ENGRAVING ON "AYERS MAP" DATED 1831.
THE FIRST STONE WAS LAID IN APRIL 1807, WHEN IT WAS CALLED CUMBERLAND COLLEGE. IT THEN BECAME THE UNIVERSITY OF NASHVILLE AND AFTERWARDS THE GEORGE PEABODY COLLEGE FOR TEACHERS.

Candidates for admission into the Freshman Class, were expected to be "accurately acquainted with the Grammar, including Prosody, of the Greek and Latin tongues, with Mair's Introduction, and such other elementary books as are taught in respectable Grammar Schools; Caesar's Commentaries, Virgil, Cicero's Orations, Greek Testament, and Dalzel's *Collectanea Graeca Mentor*, or with Greek and Latin authors equivalent to these; and also with English Grammar, Arithmetic and Geography." A student might be admitted to advanced standing if, in the judgment of the faculty, he was "equal to the class for which he shall be a candidate."[5] At 13, Billy enrolled in the Junior year.

The Faculty consisted of five Professors, each one assisted by one or more tutors. Two of the professors, doctors Philip Lindsley and Gerard Troost, exerted special influence over Billy.

Doctor Lindsley, Presbyterian minister and President of the university, taught courses in Philosophy, Religion, and Belles-Lettres. Born in Connecticut, he had resigned the presidency of Princeton University to assume the post at Nashville in 1824. During a long life, he was a leading member of the intellectual elite in Tennessee and the Southwest.

Doctor Troost was a native of Holland, with a Master's degree in Pharmacy from the University of Amsterdam and a diploma of Doctor of Medicine from Leyden. He had earned international renown for important contributions in the field of Mineralogy. His private collection of minerals was for many years the best in the nation, and its 20,000 items were exhibited with pride at the University of Nashville.

Billy excelled in all subjects, and doctor Philip Lindsley spoke of him as "the greatest man ever graduated by the University" in his 30 years of tenure as President.[6] He distinguished himself especially at the *Agatheridan Society*, a debating club that met on Saturdays in friendly rivalry with

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[5]Allen Kelton, "The University of Nashville, 1850-75" (un-published Ph.D. dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1969), p. 93.

[6]Carter, *Op. Cit.*

another student group called the *Erosophian Literary Society*. Manuscript records of the sessions are preserved in Nashville and contain entries made by Billy's own hand in 1838, when he was secretary and then president of the club. The questions he proposed and debated provide a glimpse of what was in his mind: Was it politic for the French to assist the U. S. in the American Revolution? Was a monarchical or republican form of government preferable? Did the British act correctly in confining Napoleon at St. Helena?

In a three month period that year, Billy signed out from the library, to read at home, five volumes of the works of William Robertson (1721-1793), whose 12 volumes of European and American history, re-edited in 1822, were highly regarded at that time.

It is interesting to compare Billy's school performance with that of Henry A. Crabb, a fellow student at the University of Nashville whose filibustering activities in the 50s ran parallel to those of the "Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny." A shower of Mexican bullets ended Crabb's life in Caborca, Sonora and his head was placed in exhibition for several days at the town's main plaza floating in a jar of mescal. Henry and Billy were the same age, but Crabb was three years behind in his studies, and in the Junior year was put back into the Sophomore class and later expelled from the school.

Billy's brother, James, was a classmate of Chatham Roberdeau Wheat, future filibuster who would accompany López in Cuba, Alvarez in Mexico, and Walker in Nicaragua, and would also command the famous *Louisiana Tigers* battalion in the Civil War, finally losing his life at the Battle of Richmond.

Billy met Crabb, Wheat, and other future filibusters at the University of Nashville, but at that time they were not his special friends. During puberty and adolescence he preferred the company of John Berrien Lindsley, Robert James Farquharson, Jesse Wharton Hume, Fielding Nathaniel Ewing, Samuel M. Edgar, and other boys destined to be ministers of the church or physicians. Among them, John Berrien Lindsley, son of the University President, was a close friend of Billy's.

John's parents belonged to prominent families in the social, political, and intellectual circles of the United

States. His paternal line, from Princeton, New Jersey, included several university presidents and protestant ministers. His mother, deeply religious, in her youthful days in the city of New York and elsewhere, "had seen enough of fashionable life to be able to estimate at its face value the whole circle of its vanities and enchantments. She kept her children from its allurements. She neither read, nor permitted them to read, novels, romances, or any books calculated to dissipate the mind or to weaken the moral and religious principles which she daily inculcated and uniformly exemplified in her conduct. None of them ever learned even to dance."[7] From early infancy, John Berrien Lindsley's life was immersed in an atmosphere saturated with theology.

John and Billy were classmates and intimate friends at the University of Nashville. John was two years older, and also an excellent student, but he graduated a year behind Billy. He went on to study medicine, was ordained Presbyterian Minister, and eventually replaced his father in the presidency of the University of Nashville. The harmonious combination of science, theology and attractive character traits made of him one of the most useful and versatile leaders of the South during the difficult days of Reconstruction that followed the defeat in the Civil War.

On Sept. 5, 1838, Billy received a diploma from the *Agatheridan Society*, and on Oct. 3, at the age of 14 years and 5 months, the University conferred on him the degree of Bachelor in Arts. His nineteen fellow graduates were all over 17, and many of them later led successful lives. Among them were William T. Haskell, popular orator, congressman, and commander of a regiment in the war with Mexico; Robert H. Marr, eminent lawyer and New Orleans Judge; William J. Sykes, jurist and public speaker; Charles M. Carroll, Commander of the Fifteenth Tennessee Regiment; and William K. Foster, captain in the Confederate Army.

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[7] John Edwin Windrow, *John Berrien Lindsley*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1938), p. 7.

2. The Doctor

Two persons who must have played roles in Billy's heroic childhood fantasies, passed away during his adolescence. Uncle Hendrick (a naval officer) died in 1839, and grandfather Norvell, of Revolutionary fame, in 1843. By that time, grandiose dreams transported Billy to higher regions, treading footsteps of different models.

His identification with Dr. Philip Lindsley pulled him towards the ministry, while Dr. Troost led him to science. The Dutch physician's personality temporarily prevailed, impelling Billy, and also his friend John, into the study of medicine. Obviously, diverse factors may have influenced the decision, and it would be a logical conjecture to suppose that Mrs. Walker's long illness and her son's ardent desires to cure her played an important, even decisive role in his selection of a medical career.

As a prerequisite to enter medical school, the applicant had to serve two years apprenticeship under a reputable physician. John spent them in the office of Dr. William G. Dickinson, in Nashville. Billy studied medical books in the office of Dr. Jennings, one of Nashville's best known practitioners of that day. He also visited the office of his friend and neighbor Dr. Felix Robertson, whose daughter, Elizabeth, is the only "intimate" woman friend of Billy that we know of in his home town.

A contemporary describes Elizabeth as "Nashville's Madame de Stael, who, by her wit, her exquisite manners and her magnetic character, wielded the scepter until death gently loosened it from her hand."[1] The same source calls her an "old and intimate friend" of William Walker, but nobody suggests the existence of any love affair between them. Billy's

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[1] "William Walker, Soldier of Fortune and Romanticist in Love." *Nashville American* 5/27/1905, (clipping at the Tennessee State Library and Archives).

cousin and lifelong friend, Mrs. Bryant, flatly states that except for his love for the deaf and dumb girl of New Orleans, he never noticed women.

As was the custom in American universities at that time, Nashville University automatically extended the title of *Master* to any alumnus who solicited it three years after obtaining the *Bachelor* degree. Billy received his second diploma on Oct. 6, 1841, and on the 29th of the same month, at 17 years of age, he entered the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in Philadelphia. There he met among his classmates, Elisha Kent Kane, who acquired renown in the U. S. Navy for Arctic explorations while Walker fought in Nicaragua. Kane's name was immortalized when it was given to the portion of the ocean between Greenland and the Queen Elizabeth islands.

Several Nashville alumni accompanied Billy at the medical school in Philadelphia, but in 1841 John Berrien Lindsley was not among them. Instead, John started his studies at the Medical Institute of Louisville, Kentucky. Then began a series of letters from Billy that allow us valuable glimpses into his mind.

His first letter to John is dated Nov. 6, 1841. It was written in two parts. One part was addressed to Messrs. R. Gardner, J. Gowen, J. B. Lindsley, and G. W. Ramsay. Billy filled six long pages with detailed descriptions of the professors and the medical schools of Philadelphia. The second part, one page, addressed to Lindsley alone, told him about the marine shells and anatomical collections at the Wistar Museum attached to the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Troost's name is not mentioned, but the influence of the Dutch mineralogist and physician is clearly seen, directing Billy's mind to science. At the close, we see Dr. Lindsley's religious influence: "Write me soon; remember me during life, and may we finally meet in that 'rest which remaineth for the people of God' is the prayer of your friend -- WM. WALKER."[2]

The Lindsley influence came to the fore in the second

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[2]William Walker, Letters to John Berrien Lindsley, Miss Margaret Lindsley Warden's manuscript family holdings (Nashville).

correspondence from Philadelphia, dated Dec. 30, 1841. It is a long letter that began with medical topics but promptly turned to theology and continued on religious subjects till the end. Billy's childhood hero, Napoleon, remained impressed in his mind, as when he saw the likeness of Bonaparte in the facial features of a professor. Altruistic sentiments permeate the epistle, which is usual during adolescence. The total absence of women and sex is worthy of notice. Worthy of notice, too, is his thought that if Dr. Parker, a missionary, succeeded in establishing a hospital in China, "civilization will have a door of entrance, which it has not before had, to the Chinese." This thought embodied the germ of the "mission" Walker would devote his life to in the future: the introduction of "civilization" into Sonora and Nicaragua.

In the meantime, Billy breezed through the two years of the medical curriculum. Each school year -- from the first Monday in November to the middle of the following March -- he attended five daily lectures in the classrooms and made the prescribed rounds of clinical instruction in the Philadelphia hospitals affiliated with the University. Seven professors taught him courses on the Practice and Theory of Medicine, Chemistry, Surgery, Anatomy, Institutes of Medicine, Materia Medica and Pharmacy, Obstetrics, and the Diseases of Women and Children.

John Berrien Lindsley moved to Philadelphia in 1842 and finished the second year at the University of Pennsylvania with Billy. John's thesis was on "Inflammation" while Billy's was on "The Structure and Function of the Iris," the part of the eye responsible for its color. The future "Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny" wrote it under the guidance of Professor William E. Horner, renowned anatomist who discovered and gave his name to an ocular muscle.

It is interesting to read Dr. William Gibson's parting words on closing his surgical lectures to Billy's class: "Again I say, go forth filled with love and zeal for your profession. You can not all be great: but you can all be good. A good physician will receive the blessings of a gen-

eration yet unborn. That such may be your luck is my earnest prayer."[3] Such prayer went unanswered in Billy's case.

University regulations required that the candidate had to be at least twenty-one years old in order to become Doctor of Medicine, but this was waived in Billy's case when he received his diploma at the Musical Fund Hall in Philadelphia on Friday, March 31, 1843, before his nineteenth birthday. No member of his family was present at the ceremony, and after having "the honor of hearing a few Latin words muttered at him, in a most ungraceful style," and partaking dinner with John, diploma in hand both young men proceeded to Camden to catch a train for New York.[4] John accompanied his friend until he left him aboard the steamship *Emerald*, which sailed for Le Havre on Saturday, April 8, 1843.

In a letter to his brother A. V. S. Lindsley, dated that same day, John registered his deep bonds of friendship with Billy: "Dear Van, --Being rather tired of rambling about, and feeling quite lonesome now that William Walker has bid me a long farewell, I concluded that nothing would more effectually dissipate my solitary feelings than dropping a few lines to you . . ."[5]

The separation did not affect Billy in exactly the same way, for his mind was filled with exuberant expectations of traveling to Europe to perfect his medical knowledge in the best centers of the world. He was ambitious and hoped to achieve "greatness" and renown in Medicine. In France, however, Billy was lonely and perplexed about European mores, as he acknowledged in his first letter to John from Europe:

> Paris July 15th 1843
> My Dear Friend,
> What an age since I parted from you! How often have I recalled the words which you last uttered! God bless you!" — had this been said, as it is too

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[3]Windrow, *Op. Cit.*, p. 9.

[4]Ibid., p. 10.

[5]Ibid.

> often repeated, it would not have affected me; but the trembling voice and the filling eye plainly indicated that these words had, in your mouth, their full signification.
>
> Alas! I was too light-hearted to know the value of the treasure with which I parted. We cannot, indeed, estimate the value of a true, a loving friend, we can only approximate to it when we mix much with the world, and discover the emptiness of pretended friendship, the hollowness of the ten thousand professions which ceremony makes. But I must not entertain you with such melancholy reflections.
>
> For two months and a half I have been in the *centre* of France, from which radiate all the influences, social, moral, literary, political, scientific, and religious that move the whole nation. What a field is here opened for the observation of man! . . . The relations of the two sexes among all classes of society are horrible. You find many married couples, between whom there exists a tacit agreement that the husband may have as many mistresses and the wife as many lovers as each may choose. . . . The poison is found in every vein; the effects of it may be seen on the whole body. What a striking lesson may the moralist learn here! . . .
>
> One of my first visits in the capital was to the French Institute . . .[6]

The letter is very long and chronicles detailed observations on medical topics and French scientists. Contrasting with the second letter from Philadelphia, the initial one from Paris contains more medicine than religion, suggesting that Billy was intent on perfecting his craft. Altruistic ideals and religious beliefs continued channeling the young man's energies towards excellence in the medical field, while the proverbial licentiousness of the French capital shocked his puritanical sensibility.

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[6]Ibid., p. 178.

The sentimental outburst in the opening paragraph came as a surprise for John who didn't expect it from Billy, whom he considered possessed by *philosophy* rather than *humanity*, as he told him in a letter written in October.

3. Crisis in Paris

The French capital, with one million inhabitants in 1843, offered plenty of stimulants to arouse repressed yearnings in the puritanical youngster from Nashville. As told in his first letter to John from Paris: "I am living in the *Quartier Latin* . . . For the sake of studying the students, I have made the acquaintance of several of them --students in law -- they may suffice as a specimen, for here all students are of the same description. Some of them are a curious *mêlange;* they will live on six sous per day, and in the evening expend their money at the coffee house or the theatre. Most of them have mistresses, and nobody thinks them any the worse for it."[1]

As he would recall years later, in the great metropolis Billy mixed with the "roystering" students of the Latin Quarter, visited "La Chaumière and such like places," and "put on a blouse and drank at Paul Nicquet's with the Parisian thieves and *chiffoniers.*" The experience left him with a very unpleasant aftertaste, and in his recollections, he immediately condemned Paris, as "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."[2]

In this Paris, Billy lost interest in his medical pursuits, abandoning forever his medical career a few months after arriving in France. His second letter to John from

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[1]Windrow, *Op. Cit.*, p. 179.

[2]"Biscaccianti -- Paris, Frenchmen Generally," *Daily Crescent* (New Orleans), 1/14/1850, p.2 c.2.

Europe, dated Nov. 1843, revealed that Billy no longer considered himself a member of the medical profession:

> Paris, November 14th 1843
> My Dear Friend,
>
> Yesterday I received your letter of the 6th ultimo, which afforded me much satisfaction: not only gave me pleasure, but also conferred a benefit. You say in the first paragraph that you were gratified to learn that I possessed less *philosophy* but more *humanity* than you expected. I am sorry, my dear John, that you ever thought my *philosophy* was opposed to *humanity*. With me, the highest philosophy is humanity; the greatest benefactor, the best philosopher.
>
> The cold systems of the mere intelligence are but the statue; true — a Phidias can sometimes make it appear animated; but, the moral emotions and affections only can breathe into it the breath of life.
>
> Last winter, it was you who were more of the Stoic than I. For some years I have been convinced that the key of wisdom lay in the words of the apostle: "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away."
>
> And charity is not that vague something of which, like the spirit of Job's dream, you cannot discern the form and that undefined feeling which embraces everything. This general emotion is often the mist which hides real love. In science, you know that we can never reach the generalities, but through the individual facts, neither in the divine science, can we attain universal benevolence, but with the moistened eye and touched heart of individual friendship.
>
> You need not be afraid of wearying me by an account of yourself: it is precisely the subject on which I wish you to dilate. In regard to your theological studies, I have not understood whether you

would pursue them in Nashville or at some Seminary —you say that I will probably find you here (at home?) when I return: may we be so happy as to embrace each other once more!

And Jesse Hume is settled at Gallatin! I wish him all the *personal* success possible. When we last parted, it was after a long discussion on the Trinity; no doubt he thinks me an arch-heretic, but I am sure that if he thinks thus, he also pities me.

. . . I hardly write to any one but my parents. Remember me also to Edgar and all other friends — particularly to Dr. Troost. I hope to see the dear old man alive and well when I return.

The present position and the prospects of France are extremely interesting . . .

A very lengthy paragraph on political topics revealed Billy's anti-Catholic opinions: "To hear a Catholic priest talking of liberty, is like a monster talking of beauty . . . the spirit of freedom and of Romanism are enemies." The letter then continued under the date Nov. 20:

More than six months have elapsed since I landed in Europe; and my visit has already had a great influence in my opinions. It has made me more of an American than ever . . . I rejoice that there is a "land of the free." . . .

The information contained in your letter in regard to yourself was different from what I expected. From what you said last winter I thought it very probable that you would fix yourself near Lebanon and practice medicine during the last summer. You seem, however, to have given up all idea of practicing "the healing art."

What you say in regard to the number of physicians, is very true: there is no famine as to that variety of wheat — or perhaps of tares . . .

Suppose the medical profession to be represented by some vital part — with all due respect to the cook, let us take the stomach. If some irritation

> (in this case, the desire of living without working is the irritant) exist in the organ, an inflammation generally ensues; but the *vis medicatrix naturae* (what would become of a doctor if he hadn't the right to talk his nonsense in Latin, so that nobody can understand his folly?) intervenes, and establishes the synergy . . .[3]

Billy not only omitted to mention a single word about the studies that filled him with enthusiasm in July, but also ridiculed the medical profession. There is no doubt that he suffered a momentous alteration between July and November, 1843. His zeal for higher medical achievements suddenly disappeared and was replaced by scorn and mockery, making it clear that he no longer thought of himself as physician.

Indeed, Billy never again showed any interest in "the healing art." His explanation for this startling change, when forced to explain it to his family in Nashville, was retold by his cousin, Mrs. Bryant. According to her, when Billy returned home from Europe in 1845 and told his parents of his decision to abandon the medical career, he simply alleged that "there is no height to reach in medicine and surgery; even the most eminent doctors can be put in the shade and their life-work made as naught, by the simple discovery of some beginner. I have seen this happen in America, England and France. There is no stability in it."[4]

Such an explanation sounds plausible in somebody like Billy, who cherished high ideals from early childhood; it also accords with his thoughts in the November letter. Yet, it is curious that he abstained from mentioning his decision in the letter to John, and, of course, he also failed to narrate the circumstances that led him to give up medicine. He certainly had the opportunity to explain them when commenting about John's theological studies, but he kept silent, which suggests that what happened in Paris was shameful for him and he dared not tell anybody about it, not

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[3]Windrow, *Op. Cit.*, p. 182.

[4]Carter, *Op. Cit.*

even his best friend.

The pressing necessity that he felt to share his inner conflicts with somebody was expressed clearly later, from London, but was also present in the letter from Paris --in the quotation from the Bible concerning charity and "the moistened eye and touched heart of individual friendship." His unspoken crisis was alluded to towards the end of the letter:

> . . . the turn of your mind, the education that you have received, the principles that you have imbibed, the circumstances which surround you -- all tend to lead you into the theological, rather than the medical profession.
>
> You speak of your early impressions: early impressions are hard to erase. They are like the figures which we make on caoutchouc: by an exertion of force you may stretch the *gum elastic* until the figures disappear; but when you relax your efforts, they resume their original character. It is said that no idea which enters our mind is ever entirely removed; often, we see the spectre, as it were, of our departed notions or opinions.
>
> By experience, I know how firm is the hold of these early and long-cherished ideas. With me, whilst a child and a boy, I had determined on a political career: there have been times when I thought that the last vestige of such an idea had disappeared, but often it re-appears to me, in my waking dreams, leaving me uncertain whether it be an angel of light or an angel of darkness.[5]

This was all: not a word was said about the momentous decision or the circumstances surrounding it, although his new career was evident in the long paragraphs he dedicated to political affairs.

It is obvious that Billy's grandiose childhood dreams of power had supplanted Dr. Troost and other scientific and

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[5]Windrow, *Op. Cit.*, p. 184.

religious models. "I hope to see the dear doctor alive and well when I return" are words that acquire an added nostalgic tinge now that the good doctor's image had been relegated behind deep shadows in his mind.

On the other hand, Billy's effort to convince John that his *philosophy* was not opposed to *humanity* exposed an inner conflict between his altruistic ideals and his quest for power. Finally, his anti-Catholic and his patriotic, anti-monarchic remarks illustrated facets of his thinking which are relevant in the light of his future filibustering activities.

Cancelling plans for studying in Germany, in February 1844 Billy travelled to London, capital of the British Empire and largest city of Europe. On March 27, he wrote another letter to his friend in Nashville:

> . . . When I write to you, John, I don't feel in the *descriptive* fit; buildings and scenes and all the other themes of guide-books are too cold and inanimate for the letters of friendship. Even society, with its many-sided faces, disappears when I think of writing to you. After all, what are these but phantasmagoria! . . . 'tis delightful to view the fleeting shadows as they pass; they are beautiful like the rainbow, but like it they are momentary and nourish not. But the beams of friendship — they give us light and they nourish. And Love is abiding — he flees not in sorrow or in joy, in time or in eternity.
>
> Let us have but the loving heart —and the kindly eye and the affectionate tongue, and what care we for gilded palaces or crumbling ruins or lofty arches! 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! Then will it be truly the speech of heart to heart; then shall we see each other "face to face" — now "we see through a glass

darkly" — we see but the reflection of each other's souls. Meanwhile, we can lean upon each other in this journey through the world: sometimes as we scramble through the briars we can pull the thorns from each others hands, and apply salves to the wounds, and midst the meadows we can together pluck the flowers.

I almost envy you the life you lead at Nashville: and though we do not walk bodily together, my mind figuratively wanders with you over the green grass and midst the high trees. And how plainly every thing comes before me!

Now we are on the cliffs on the Cumberland, just below the reservoir: you have a long tin mustard box in your hand, and every now and then a luckless snail is thrown into it: and with converse sweet we while away the hour. Sometimes it is a subject of taste which we discuss —favorite passages of a favorite author —(yes, John, every time I read Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, I think of you, and of your fondness for them) — or the higher and more interesting subjects which relate to God and eternity engage our attention.

When will these happy hours come back again! When shall we again walk

> *"On the dry smooth-shaven green*
> *To behold the wandering moon,*
> *Riding near her highest noon,*
> *Like one that had been led astray*
> *Through the heaven's wide pathless way*
> *And oft, as if her head she bowed*
> *Stooping through a fleecy cloud."*

You know that we used frequently to speak of the great characters which have appeared in the world. and attempt to analyze feelings and opinions by the light of biography. 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.
>
> Who can tell what an hour may bring forth? And how vain in man to say "I *will* do."! Yet how great, frequently, is the power of the human will! It is this mixture of greatness and littleness, of strength and weakness, which confounds.[6]

The introspection and nostalgia that mark this letter transmit the profound melancholy that Billy felt when he arrived in London, giving us an additional clue about his crisis in Paris. "When I write to you, John," opened a series of reflections evoked by Parisian sorrow that deepened in the cold gloom of London's wintertime. Lonely and anguished, Billy longed for the presence of a friend "who can listen and sympathize and counsel." Biblical quotations mingled with nostalgic recollections of distant childhood by the Cumberland river: "When will these happy hours come back again!" And the poetry fit his mood when he quoted from Milton's *Il Penseroso* (l. 66-72), whose octosyllabic couplets *". . . hail, thou Goddess, sage and holy, / Hail divinest Melancholy."*[7]

Billy then disclosed the thought that haunted him: "When we look within and see the motions of our heart . . . nay, the hearing of a single word may change the whole course of existence." In the depth of the depression triggered by the events that led Billy to forsake the medical career in

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[6]Ibid., p. 186.

[7]John Milton, *Il Penseroso* l. 11-12. Merritt Y. Hughes, ed., *John Milton -- Complete Poems and Major Prose*. (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957), p. 72.

Paris, the question immediately arises: Which word changed his life? Who uttered it? The answer is an unspoken secret that could not possibly be communicated to John in the letter -- "What time it will be, John, when our lips . . . can tell what words of earth can ne'er convey! . . . now we see but the reflection of each other's souls."

One of the reflections of Walker's soul --a very interesting poem, came in his next letter to John from London, dated May 17, 1844. Following the pattern set in the previous letters, this one was totally devoid of any medical topic and profusely displayed Billy's interest in politics, but its most important part is the poem. It will be presented, and analyzed, in chapter ten.

Billy's next letter to John, his last from Europe, came from Italy:

> Venice, November 19th, 1844
> My Dear John,
>
> I received your very agreeable letter — without a date —yesterday morning. At the beginning of your letter, you seem to be at a loss what to say; but, at last, you got to the subject most interesting to me —the *Ego*. News from the *backwoods* —which I am fool enough to think as civilized, if not more so, than the old countries of Europe — is always agreeable, whether of a general or purely local nature. But news, as you say, comes to us now-a-days through the papers rather than through letters. There is, however, one thing, John, which no one but a friend can write to me — the feeling of a friend's heart . . .
>
> Since leaving England, I have passed through Belgium, Rhenish Prussia, up the Rhine through Switzerland into Italy. But I have not space or time, now, to tell you all the wonderful things that I have seen . . .
>
> How beautiful is the old *mythos* of Time devouring his children. A moment is born, devoured — and

where is it? Yet how much may depend on a moment: the whole history of a man may be centered in an instant. . . . Were we masters of the science of *soul's* calculations, would it not be a rational problem given any one moment of a man's life, to find his whole past and future? . . .

Astrologists seized on one moment —that of birth —as most fit for these calculations of life: the falsity of their prognostications arose from their neglecting altogether the most important element of the problem —the disposition of the infant. . . . Here lies the difficulty —to know the state of the infant's mind. Then what a number and variety of disturbing causes necessarily enter into the calculation! *Enfin*, it is a most puzzling problem.

Such is the nature of our reflections when arriving at one of the turns in life we cast a backward look on the road over which we have passed. We are too young, however, to have a long road behind us, and we look forward more than behind. At least it is so with me.

The future! The future! Something always coming but never here. Some portions of the past too are very interesting; the present, however, is almost always tiresome . . .

The great pleasure is that of Imagination: the forms of Hope and Memory are beautiful when tinged with the colors of fancy —without the coloring, they are very ordinary things — These are what may be called the purely *mental* pleasures: there are others above and beyond — the moral pleasures —the pleasure of venerating and worshiping Deity —the pleasure of doing good.

I am getting very tired of the wandering life I have led for some time, and look forward, with plea-

sure, to the time when I shall be again in the active, stirring world of the west. I do not know exactly when I shall be at home; some time, probably, in April or May next. On the 8th of May, I will be twenty-one; and I hope to pass that day at home.

You must be quite learned in Theology by this time; in a year and a half of study a man may do a vast deal. I hope you have given up your idea of becoming a missionary, and purpose taking up your abode in some civilized part of the world where a fellow can have a chance to seeing you every now and then.

Ah! John, it is a hard thing to live in the world without our natural friends —those whom birth has given us. So, I hope you have fallen, or will fall, in love with some young lady near Nashville and get married; and I hope, like a true *cara sposa*, she will govern you completely and not let you emigrate into any outlandish region where you will have no companions but gibbering savages or half-civilized pagans.

Au plaisir de vous revoir — as the misses in French boarding schools are made to say — I am

Your friend, affectionately,

WM. WALKER[8]

Close to a year after leaving Paris, Billy was still depressed and obsessed by the thought that an apparently trivial matter -- a single word -- triggered a momentous alteration in his life. He remained absorbed in introspection, overwhelmed by internal conflicts which he was unable to solve. His imagination evoked a glorious, enigmatic future that always loomed beyond his reach.

The anxiously awaited future still remained hidden when Billy returned to Nashville in 1845, but the two years in

[8]Windrow, *Op. Cit.*, p. 187.

Europe had left indelible marks. The teenager physician that sailed on the *Emerald* filled with expectations in April, 1843, saw his hopes buried in Paris, and reviving "spectres" of "departed" childhood dreams, deeply tinged with the colors of fancy, he returned to America determined to build a glorious destiny in the political arena of his homeland.

After two years of introspection and attentive observation of social and political conditions in the Old World, his beliefs and objectives seem to have been crystallized. We have already seen in his letters to Lindsley his attempts at self-analysis. Before following his subsequent steps in America, we need to consider some relevant European factors that exerted a tangible influence on him.

The map of Europe, elaborated at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, appeared to have frozen the flow of History, showing only homogeneous monarchical governments, half a century after the French Revolution. Czar Nicholas I of Russia; Queen Victoria of England; Isabel II of Spain; Maria II of Portugal; Louis Philippe of France; Leopold I of Belgium; William II of Holland; Christian VIII of Denmark; Charles XIV and Oscar I of Sweden; Frederick William IV of Prussia; Archduke Louis, regent of Austria (and Prince Metternich, arbiter of Europe); Pope Gregory VI of Rome; and Sultan Abdul Mejid of Turkey, formed a solid monarchical block while revolutionary forces were stirring in Europe, preparing the stage for the generalized explosions of 1848.

The Romantic Era was coming to a close, and 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.

The widely diversified currents of thought and the cultural heritage to which Walker was exposed in Europe, provided him with remarkable enlightenment.

In Paris, Billy 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*. He walked the same streets as Karl Marx (who resided in the French capital when Billy was there) precisely when in 1844

he proclaimed his famous dictum that religion is the opium of the people.

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