

# The King of the Filibusterers

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

**D**AWN OF a September morning 75 years ago. Along the beach outside the seaport of Trujillo in Honduras, struggled a file of swarthy-faced soldiers, their rifles slanting across the shoulders of their dirty-white uniforms, their bare feet kicking up little spurts of sand as they shuffled along.

In their midst was another little man, but unlike his captors he was light-haired (a "cotton-head" they called him back in his native Tennessee), freckle-faced, almost boyishly slender for all of his thirty-six years. His old flannel shirt was open at the throat, his ragged trousers were tucked into worn boots and in his hand he carried a battered, faded old black hat.

Beside him walked a tall black-robed Spanish priest who held a crucifix in front of the little blonde man's face. But it is doubtful if his cold gray eyes saw it. They were looking away across the fringe of the tropical jungle to the black and purple-shadowed mountains which the rays of the morning sun were beginning to paint with gold.

"Halt!" The line of marching men stopped, but only the little man in the center obeyed the command with true military precision. Another sharp command and the stonching rifle-bearers formed a ragged line along the beach. An officer came forward with a handkerchief in his hand, but the little man waved him aside. As he looked into the black mouths of the rifles pointed at his heart, he spoke slowly, gently:

"The war which I made upon you was wrong, and I want to avail myself of this last opportunity to beg your forgiveness. That done, I die resigned. I would like to think that my life and my death will have been for the good of society."

"Fire!" As the little man sagged down to the ground, another volley of bullets rained upon his crumpled form. Then a single soldier walked forward, placed the muzzle of his gun close to the little man's head and fired.

Thus died William Walker, "the gray-eyed man of destiny," the nineteenth-century Cortez, "the Napoleon of Central America." He was all of these and much more, for this tow-headed soldier of fortune was one of the most remarkable characters in American history. There was a time when his doings were a matter of international concern, when he was a figure in the slavery dispute which led to the Civil war and when "the occupied" more columns of news and editorials in American and British journals than Presidents Pierce and Buchanan or Queen Victoria. No man ever so dazzled the American mind and heart as this quiet little man. He was the beginning of that peculiar madness which affects New York city whenever a hero visits there.

There was nothing in Walker's early career, unless it was the versatility of the man, to indicate the important role he was destined to play on the stage of world affairs. The son of a Scotch Presbyterian banker in Nashville, Tenn., Walker was a precocious child who was graduated from the University of Nashville at the age of seventeen. His father wanted him to be a minister but his inclination was to medicine. Studying for two years in the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania, he then went abroad to complete his education at Edinburgh and Paris. At the age of twenty-one he was back in Nashville "the most accomplished surgeon that ever visited the city."

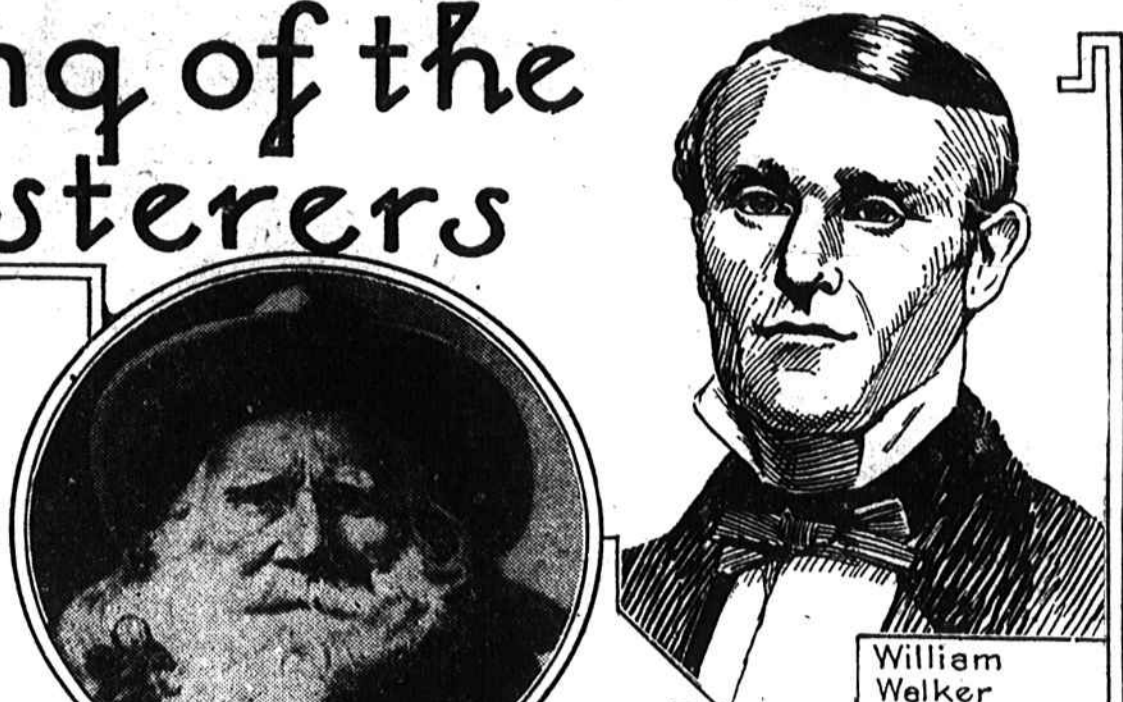
But he soon tired of medicine and next took up the study of law. As soon as he was ready to practice, he moved to New Orleans but because of his retiring disposition, which resulted in a lack of clients, he gave up the law for journalism. In 1848 he became one of the editors and proprietors of the Crescent which soon became an important newspaper in that city. At that time New Orleans was the outfitting place for many filibustering expeditions in Latin-American waters and countries. Considering Walker's later career it seems strange that his editorial policy concerning such expeditions was an extremely conservative one. But it was and that had something to do with the failure of his paper.

However, an unfortunate love affair was the principal reason for his leaving New Orleans and seeking his fortune in the California gold fields. He soon drifted into journalism again, this time as editor of the San Francisco Daily Herald.

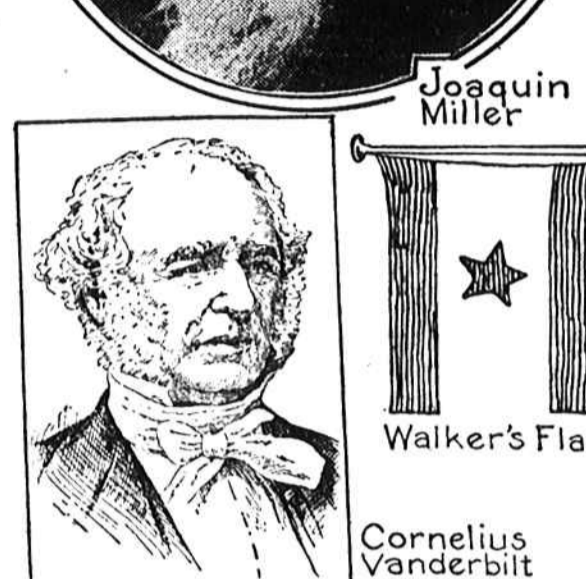
At this time down in Central America Nicaragua was undergoing one of its periodical revolutions, a war in which the Democrats and Legitimists were struggling for control. Walker wrote to General Castellon, head of the Democrats, offering the service of 300 American colonists "liable to military service if they would agree to provide land for them." Castellon was delighted to have such allies and readily signed the agreement, so in May, 1855, Walker at the head of 56 adventurers sailed from San Francisco aboard the S. S. Vesta which had been secretly loaded with arms and ammunition. Arriving in Realajo, the American leader hastened to Leon, the Democrats' base, where he was warmly welcomed by Castellon, who made him a colonel and placed him in command of the "American Phalanx."

Supported by a force of several hundred Democrat soldiers, Walker, acting under orders from Castellon, marched to the attack of Rivas, one of the leading cities of Nicaragua, which was defended by some 600 Legitimist troops. But during the march Walker's Nicaraguan allies began deserting and by the time he reached the city they had dwindled to 100, all of whom fled at the first fire of the Legitimists. Despite this defection, Walker led his 56 Americans on to the capture of the city, losing 6 dead and 12 wounded.

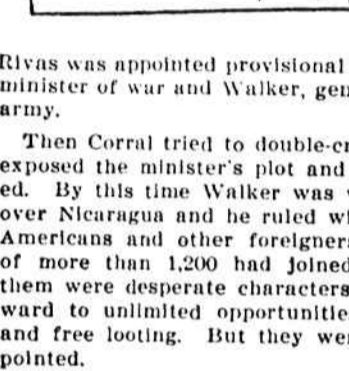
Unable to hold the city with his tiny force, Walker retreated to Leon, where he threatened to leave Castellon's service and enlist under the banner of the president of Honduras. But their difficulties were patched up and Walker went on from victory to victory, the climax coming in his capture of Granada, the principal city of Nicaragua, by a surprise attack made from a steamer on Lake Nicaragua. Soon afterwards he signed a peace agreement with General Corral, leader of the Legitimists, by which Don Patricio



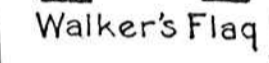
William Walker



Joaquin Miller



Cornelius Vanderbilt



Walker's Flag



Rivas was appointed provisional president, Corral minister of war and Walker, generalissimo of the army.

Then Corral tried to double-cross Walker, who exposed the minister's plot and had him executed. By this time Walker was virtually dictator over Nicaragua and he ruled with an iron hand. Americans and other foreigners to the number of more than 1,200 had joined him. Some of them were desperate characters who looked forward to unlimited opportunities for free living and free looting. But they were bitterly disappointed.

While Walker was master of Nicaragua that country enjoyed a peace and contentment it had not known for years. But trouble was brewing for him on the outside. The other Central American republics, Costa Rica, Honduras, Salvador, and Guatemala, were becoming alarmed over the prospect of his forming a "United States of Central America," as he was dreaming of doing, and extending his influence over their countries.

Great Britain was also becoming concerned over his growing power. If the United States secured control of Nicaragua and dug a Nicaraguan canal, England's commercial supremacy would be threatened. If he extended his power throughout Central America, it meant a lessening of England's influence there. And France and Spain agreed with Britain that the expansion of the United States in that quarter was undesirable.

As a matter of fact their fears were groundless so far as Walker's having an official standing as an agent of American Imperialism was concerned. For he was persona non grata with his own country as much as he was with the others. William L. Marcy, secretary of state, looked upon him as little more than a criminal and one whose example might stimulate filibustering and embroil the United States in endless difficulties with her southern neighbors. In the South he was something of a hero but in the North where anti-slavery sentiment was growing, his pro-slavery views were causing suspicion and alarm. But even though it is doubtful if Walker had any idea of trying to aid the extension of slavery, he made the fatal mistake of antagonizing the powerful financial interests of the North, notably the group of men headed by old Cornelius Vanderbilt who had been exploiting Nicaragua.

They were the owners of the Transit company which had a contract to dig a Nicaraguan canal and which was running a line of steamers from New York to Nicaragua on the Atlantic side and another line from that country up to San Francisco on the Pacific side. This company had agreed to pay Nicaragua \$10,000 and 10 per cent of its profits each year in return for a monopoly of the carrying trade to and from that country.

Walker, believing that the Transit company had been cheating his adopted country, started an investigation. The result was that he demanded a settlement of \$250,000 which the financiers refused. Thereupon he seized the company's property as security for the debt, revoked its charter and granted a new one to a rival company. Old Cornelius Vanderbilt was furious. He resolved to smash Walker.

Costa Rica had already started war against Nicaragua and Honduras was preparing to take up arms. Both of the hostile countries were being supplied with arms, if not financial support, by England. It is said that the necessary financial support was given by Vanderbilt and his colleagues. In a preliminary skirmish a Costa Rican force, led by the Prussian general, Von Bulow, and made up of mercenaries as well as natives of Costa Rica, defeated a force of Nicaraguans and filibusterers, led by one of Walker's subordinates, and captured Rivas.

But it was a different story when Walker rode out from Granada in April, 1856, with 500 men, four-fifths of them Americans, to give battle to the army of 3,200 Costa Ricans. Although he was driven from the battlefield, he inflicted such heavy losses on the enemy that they were glad to withdraw.

A mixed army of Leonese and Hondurans next menaced him from the north but by quick work he repulsed it, then turned his attention to internal affairs. He became a candidate for the presidency of Nicaragua and in July, 1856, won the election with the largest vote ever cast for that office. But he was not allowed to enjoy his

triumph very long. Soon his enemies were crossing the border again. There followed a series of defeats which forced him to evacuate Granada and he destroyed it to keep it from falling into the hands of the enemy. Finally with a remnant of the army which had followed him so devotedly, he was cornered in a coast town. In April, 1857, the American warship St. Mary's sailed into the harbor and Captain Davis, its commander, demanded that Walker surrender "in the name of humanity." Walker refused, but when he saw that his small force was doomed to be overwhelmed by the enemy he was willing to accept the safe convoy which Davis offered him.

Going aboard the St. Mary's he was taken to Panama and from there made his way to New York, where he was received in triumph. Hastening on to Washington, he demanded that the United States government support him in restoring to him the presidency of Nicaragua to which he had been legally elected. But Washington turned a deaf ear to his pleas. He went on into the South where he was received with the wildest enthusiasm and the papers of that period are filled with news of his schemes for regaining the power he had once held.

In the meantime Nicaragua had elected another president but Walker was not willing to accept this evidence that the southern republic was through with its "gringo presidente." He organized another filibustering expedition, was arrested for doing so but, when brought to trial, was acquitted. Within two weeks he had sailed from New Orleans with a force of 150 men, landed his munitions at San Juan del Norte and captured Castle Viejo.

In December Commodore Paulding arrived in the United States frigate Wabash, landed a force of 350 men, trained his guns on Walker's camp and demanded his surrender. Walker was taken to Washington as a prisoner of war. But the federal government refused to receive him and President Buchanan even rebuked Paulding for his act and suspended him from duty. Although Walker was turned free, a public proclamation forbade his interfering with Central American affairs again.

By now the presidency of Nicaragua had become an obsession with Walker. For two years he made several attempts to lead another expedition to Nicaragua but he was too closely watched by both the American and British governments to succeed. Unable to go there direct, he decided to get into the country by way of Honduras. In August, 1860, he sailed from Mobile with 100 devoted followers. Within two weeks he had entered Nicaragua and captured the town of Trujillo.

Then a warship appeared—this time a British vessel, the Icarus, commanded by Captain Salmon. Declaring that Walker was interfering with British rights in the town, Salmon demanded the filibusterer's surrender. Walker refused but when a force of Hondurans commanded by General Alvarez began to mass to recapture the town, Walker evacuated it and with 70 men retreated down the coast. The Honduran leader and his British ally followed and cornered the filibusterers at Rio Negro.

Walker surrendered to Salmon on his promise not to turn him over to the Hondurans, a promise which the British officer broke as soon as they returned to Trujillo. Walker and his men were delivered into the hands of Alvarez. His followers were released through the intercession of the British officer but when Salmon told Walker "if you will appeal to me as an American citizen I will save you with the rest," Walker's reply was "The President of Nicaragua is a citizen of Nicaragua." Facing death, he would not give up his dream of being a ruler.

The Hondurans, who looked upon him as an alien tyrant whose ambition threatened the security of their country and all Central American republics, court-martialed him and sentenced him to death. So on the morning of September 12, 1860, he walked bravely to his death in front of a firing squad.

Joaquin Miller, that queer genius who was a follower of the "king of the filibusterers" and who later became famous as the "Poet of the Sierras," sought to immortalize him in a long poem, "With Walker in Nicaragua," but it is doubtful if his poem is any better known today than is the subject of its inspiration. In his day William Walker was a "lost leader." Today he is a "forgotten man" nor has the recent talk of dictators served to revive even for a little while the memory of this ill-fated dictator over the destinies of an American republic.

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## The Girl Who Knew Men

By VIRGINIA MILLER  
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"THERE'S a job open?" the red-headed girl leaned far over the low railing which guarded the office proper to ask the woman firmly established on the pay envelope side of the railing.

"Yes, there's a position vacant." Miss Olson had to tell the truth, however much she disliked the redhead's green beret set saucily far back over her curls, her touched up lips and short tight little green checked dress.

"Then the job's mine," the girl grinned and gave the curls a pert toss. "I know men."

Miss Olson frowned at that I-know-men phrase. She critically inspected the card the girl had handed her. "I shall ask Mr. Adams whether he cares to see you," she said, disapproving edging her voice. She was still frowning as she crossed the office to Mr. Adams' desk and put the card before him.

"The employment agency has sent over this girl," she said. Her tone called one strike on the redhead before the youngster ever got a chance to swing.

At Miss Olson's approach Mr. Adams had hastily put aside the morning newspaper. "Oh, yes," he said. "Gosh, I hope I can get a good girl this morning. The golf tournament at my club starts this afternoon."

"I am sure the agency will send in a more satisfactory applicant before the morning is over," Miss Olson called a second strike on the redhead.

Mr. Adams took a squint at the sports page, sighed, and stuffed the paper carefully into his pocket. "Well, I'd better talk to this one now."

So Miss Olson had to swing the gate open to the saucy beret.

The redhead gave her a wink. "Watch my technique," she murmured. She walked jauntily.

"Good morning, sir," she said cheerily. "What a nice sunny office you have here!"

Mr. Adams said the office was very pleasant and thought to ask about her business experience.

"I've not had stenographic experience although I've done typing. But I've just completed ten weeks shorthand study at night school. So you can understand, this being my first secretarial position, that I must take great care choosing it," the girl said calmly. Her smile flashed. "I'm sure you're a good enough sport to realize how essential it is to my future that I take only a position in which I'll get broad experience."

Across at her desk, Miss Olson snorted. Softly, of course.

Mr. Adams looked considerably taken aback. Then he started to describe the work his secretary would be expected to do.

"Well, it sounds as if your position may be what I'm looking for," the red-headed girl said encouragingly.

At that sickening moment for Miss Olson, another girl from the employment agency arrived outside the railing.

This girl's eyes were shadowed with a terrible necessity. Miss Olson saw that necessity first. Then she saw that the plain black hat was pulled down on her head sensibly and that she used no lip stick. "I've got to have this position. I've got to," the girl said. Tears came to those dull, hungry eyes.

Miss Olson looked at the sensible outfit and the paintless face. Scarcely glancing at the card handed her, she swung the gate open and hurried the white-faced, dull-eyed girl to Mr. Adams' desk.

"The agency urges you to talk to this girl before you make your decision. She has all the qualifications you need," Miss Olson said determinedly.

"I've had some experience," the girl said nervously. "Oh, Mr. Adams, I've got to have this position. I've got to. I've an invalid mother."

She stood there, those dulled, unhappy eyes fixed on the young man. Having called the third strike on the redhead, Miss Olson nodded to her to move to the other side of the railing. But the redhead was staring with wide, startled eyes at the other applicant, so that she did not notice Miss Olson. The woman shook her in her determination to get her out of the second girl's way.

Mr. Adams glanced from the second girl to the redhead. He squirmed uneasily.

The redhead shook off Miss Olson's hand and got to her feet. She straightened her shoulders and said with a fairly bright smile: "Sorry. I understand, though. Just the wrong approach on my part. And I thought I knew better."

Miss Olson marched the girl toward the gate.

"Gosh! Mr. Adams exclaimed. "Gosh, redhead! Don't clear out. I'll—Miss Olson! Help the agency find another job for this girl. I want you for my secretary."

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## SMILES

### HELP NEEDED

"George Washington Tubbs," said the judge, sternly, "you're entirely no-account and shiftless—and I'm going to send you away for a year with hard labor."

"Please, Judge," interrupted Mrs. Tubbs from the rear of the courtroom, "will you Honah Jes kinder split dat sentence? Don't send him away from home, but let dat hard labor stand."

### Terrible! Terrible!

Did you hear the joke I played on my wife?

"Not unless you refer to your getting her to marry you."

### Hard to Break Off

Wife—James, how can you stay away from home so late at night?

Husband—Easily. I acquired the habit while courting you.—Stray Stories Magazine.

### Ins and Outs

"Do you understand the ins and outs of European politics?"

"No," answered Senator Sorghum. "Getting in trouble seems easy, but getting out is a complicated process."