



Reminiscences of the "Filibuster" War in Nicaragua

Charles William Doubleday

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In 1854, a civil war erupted in Nicaragua between the Legitimist Party, based in the city of Granada, and the Democratic Party, based in León. The Democratic Party sought military support from Walker who, to circumvent U.S. neutrality laws, obtained a contract from Democratic president Francisco Castellón to bring as many as three hundred "colonists" to Nicaragua. These mercenaries received the right to bear arms in the service of the Democratic government. Walker sailed from San Francisco on May 3, 1855, with approximately 60 men. Upon landing, the force was reinforced by 170 locals and about 100 Americans.

This book is the narrative of one of the U.S. mercenaries who was part of Walker's filibustering force. When the author of this picturesque narrative landed at San Juan del Sur in 1854 and found the country involved in civil war, with the impetuosity of youth he embraced the cause of the Democratic party of Castellón, the presidentelect, against Chamorra and the "Clericals." It was the sacred cause of liberty, he tells us, that attracted the young American citizen, though it is clear that the spirit of adventure was an active agent in his enterprise. The inevitable disillusion was wrought by the discovery of the true aims of the leaders in the sacred cause, among whom the notorious William Walker was the most active and the most distinguished. Prior to the appearance on the scene of this remarkable person, Mr. Doubleday and his band of volunteer sharpshooters had enjoyed some brisk experience of hand-to-hand fighting in the streets of Granada, of which he gives an extremely vivacious account. His sketch of Walker's career loses nothing in power and gains in ingenuousness from the fact, humorously reflected in these pages, that it is animated by an honourable feeling of loyalty towards his old comrade and an equally honourable determination to be an unflattering chronicler. He repudiates with much warmth the application of the term "filibuster" to Walker, though he confesses it was Walker's insatiable ambition and "disregard of public or private rights" that compelled the author's return to the United States. It is a curious proof of Walker's influence that, despite this rupture, Mr. Doubleday should subsequently have taken part in an unsuccessful expedition on the river San Juan for the relief of the new President, then hemmed in at Rivas. His own testimony conclusively shows that Mr. Doubleday is needlessly sensitive about terms. It does not much matter whether we speak of Walker as a military adventurer, buccaneer, filibuster, loco-foco, or Napoleon be-littled by malignant destiny, it is broadly apparent that he was a selfish and ambitious schemer, one of those fellows who would "set any place on fire to roast his own eggs." That Mr. Doubleday should lament his ignoble end is natural enough, and not the less creditable therefor. Of the literary quality of his book we may speak with sincerest commendation. Walker's audacious campaigns are set forth in a series of brilliant pictures; the sketches of the author's strange and motley companions are admirable for distinction, incisiveness, and humour; the scenic presentment is such as only uncommon skill in narration could evolve. The vivid actuality of the book is the source of its enthralling charm.

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