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When a Filibuster Meant Action

DESTINY AND GLORY. By Edward S. Wallace. Illustrated. 320 pp. New York: Coward-McCann, \$5.

By JOHN K. BETTERS-WORTH

FOR those who may have imagined filibustering to be an invention of embattled Southern Senators, Edward S. Wallace's "Destiny and Glory" will serve as an elementary lesson in the evolution of words and ways in the Western Hemisphere. Long before the filibuster became old and talkative, it was a rambunctious thing of actions rather than words.

The traditional American filibuster involved a form of international lawlessness perpetrated by military adventurers who feared neither God nor country, not even their own. Mr. Wallace traces filibustering by act if not by nomenclature far back into the Old World. Though he belabors a point by classifying Moses among the filibusters, no one will deny the title to that legion of barbarian invaders, feudal knights, Vikings and crusaders who contributed to the disorder of medieval Europe.

In the New World, Mr. Wallace ascribes a filibustering pre-eminence to the conquistadors. However, Leif Ericson might also claim a sort of priority. But in actuality it was the Dutch and English challengers of Spanish colonial hegemony who perfected an ancient art and brought the words "freebooter" and "filibuster" into the language.

In the age of its christening, freebooting was chiefly a matter of plundering Spain's mines and treasure fleets in the name of personal greed and mercantilism. The epidemic of filibustering in mid-nineteenth century America had a special contemporary applicability: the virus that caused it was Manifest Destiny.

EXPANDING America was hurting its seams. We had licked the English twice (or almost twice) and the Mexicans once, and that was enough to make us adolescent imperialists. But, though Manifest Destiny bore the rugged appearance of boisterous nationalism, its voice betrayed the soft inflections of Southern sectionalism. American boundaries were being pushed westward and southward by land and by sea in a frantic search for new slave territory, enough to enable the South to preserve its concurrent voice in the United States Senate, that same body where a century later the South's minority voice was defending itself with another form of filibuster.

"Destiny and Glory" recounts in lively fashion the stories of the madcap leaders of the South's "defensive" aggression. The greatest of them, William Walker, carried out the nearest thing to a successful filibustering operation in his conquest of Nicaragua. Narciso Lopez led



From "Destiny and Glory."
William Walker.

some of the flower and considerable of the thorn of Southern gentry in two futile assaults upon Cuba. Lesser luminaries undertook ill-fated forays into Yucatan, Ecuador and northern Mexico.

The utter irresponsibility of the filibusters was notorious. Operations were mishandled with "almost incredible stupid-

ity," without benefit of security precautions, intelligence reporting or coordination with local discontents. Any successes the filibusters achieved were no fault of theirs.

Once he was warned to his subject, Wallace goes far afield in search of freebooting. He thus is able to pay his respects to Pierre Soule, whose ministry in Madrid was barely short of an act of war. There is also Jane Carneau, whose petticoat filibustering began in the Mexican War and ended when President Grant almost annexed Santo Domingo. A final chapter tells of the vestigial filibustering of Jo Shelby's Confederate expatriates in Mexico.

Wallace, who already has three military histories to his credit, is mercifully free of the occupational dullness that often haunts his field. "Destiny and Glory" is a sprightly volume. If the style appears a bit flamboyant, it is eminently appropriate to the writer's swash-buckling subjects, whom he permits to win for themselves an enviable niche in history, even if their conquests elsewhere were portable.

Mr. Bettersworth is Professor of History at Mississippi State College and author of books about the South.