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Abstract

By 3 July 1863, Union troops under the command of General George G. Meade and elements of General Robert E. Lee's Confederate army had struggled for two days over the rolling farm lands, ridges, and rocky crags around a small farming community and county seat known as Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Within the encompassing whirlpool of battle, however, smaller dramas had unfolded, and one of them is of interest to us here. The soldiers had been fighting for the possession of a house and barn situated equidistant between the battle lines about one and one-quarter miles south-southwest of the town square. During a thirty-one hour period, the farmstead had changed hands ten times, but by midmorning of the third day, Federal troops along Cemetery Ridge could no longer tolerate the harassing sharpshooters' fire originating from the barn. After men of the 14th Connecticut Regiment recaptured the farmstead, a courier was sent out to the besieged "Nutmeggers" with orders to torch the buildings and withdraw. Shortly before the noon, the farmstead was engulfed in flames. Later, a two-hour cannonade was followed by a massed Confederate infantry assault on the Union center, the famous "Pickett's Charge." Men in butternut-and-grey again traversed the same farmstead, but by that time the earlier actions there had become anticlimactic. By 5 July the armies had withdrawn, but they had left behind a devastated landscape.

However, more was destroyed the morning of the third than a refuge for the skirmishers and sharpshooters: a secure family setting and livelihood were also consumed in the fires. The lives of the farmer, William Bliss, his wife Adeline, and their daughters Sarah and Frances had been immeasurably altered. But there is one major difference between the Bliss's situation and that of other noncombatants: during Lee's Gettysburg campaign, William and his family were the only civilians to lose everything except the clothes on their backs and that which was most dear to them-their lives. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Adams County Historical Society, ACHS, Adams County, Pennsylvania History, William Bliss, Bliss Farm, Battle of Gettysburg, Civil War, Isabel Carollton Bliss

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Parallels Between
The Life and Times of the William Bliss Family,
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***Isabel Carrollton: A Personal Retrospect* by Kneller Glen**

by Elwood W. Christ

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times"—so wrote Charles Dickens in his *Tale of Two Cities*. When many people are faced with adversity, they seek solace in their own particular ways. For some, it may be the nuclear family, sticking together in the foul weather of life; for others, it may be the Bible or other religious solace—the popular Twenty-third Psalm, for example. No matter what the outlet, many can restore their outlook on life through personal and family relationships or worship. However, for some adversity permeates their lives, as if, like Job, God is testing their faith.

By 3 July 1863, Union troops under the command of General George G. Meade and elements of General Robert E. Lee's Confederate army had struggled for two days over the rolling farm lands, ridges, and rocky crags around a small farming community and county seat known as Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Within the encompassing whirlpool of battle, however, smaller dramas had unfolded, and one of them is of interest to us here. The soldiers had been fighting for the possession of a house and barn situated equidistant between the battle lines about one and one-quarter miles south-southwest of the town square. During a thirty-one hour period, the farmstead had changed hands ten times, but by mid-morning of the third day, Federal troops along Cemetery Ridge could no longer tolerate the harassing sharpshooters' fire originating from the barn. After men of the 14th Connecticut Regiment recaptured the farmstead, a courier was sent out to the besieged "Nutmeggers" with orders to torch the buildings and withdraw. Shortly before the noon, the farmstead was engulfed in flames. Later, a two-hour cannonade was followed by a massed Confederate infantry assault on the Union center, the famous "Pickett's Charge." Men in butternut-and-grey again traversed the same farmstead, but by that time the earlier actions there

had become anticlimactic. By 5 July the armies had withdrawn, but they had left behind a devastated landscape.

However, more was destroyed the morning of the third than a refuge for the skirmishers and sharpshooters: a secure family setting and livelihood were also consumed in the fires. The lives of the farmer, William Bliss, his wife Adeline, and their daughters Sarah and Frances had been immeasurably altered. But there is one major difference between the Bliss's situation and that of other noncombatants: during Lee's Gettysburg campaign, William and his family were the only civilians to lose *everything* except the clothes on their backs and that which was most dear to them—their lives.

Refusing to be shaken by adversity, within three weeks of the holocaust, and at the age of sixty-three and probably with his wife and daughters in attendance, William sat down and began to assess the damages. On 29 July, Bliss filed a damage claim consisting of an inventory of property (personal, real estate, crops, and farm machinery) that had been obliterated by the infernos.¹

By documenting their charred lives, the Bliss family left modern scholars with one shred of evidence that gives us a few tantalizing pieces of data which belong to the enormous jigsaw puzzle known as the Bliss Farm. At least for one family, a list exists of what material culture was contained within one small farm unit at the time of the battle. Bliss's legacy, spawned by his financial adversity, has provided scholars a unique peek at mid-nineteenth-century farm life at Gettysburg.² The Bliss inventory, moreover, is more than a list of inanimate objects. Some items had some psychological significance to members of the family. Today, people have favorite clothes, save old photographs and baby shoes, and they often have a favorite book; the Blisses, too, listed similar sentimental items.

For our purposes, the Bliss inventory shows that they had acquired a considerable library for a modest farm family. Although recording the loss of their hundred volumes and a Bible and testaments, they did not recall any titles except one. Near the end of their inventory was written "Book Isabella Carrollton," probably *Isabell Carrolltown: A Personal Retrospect*, a 340-page novel by Kneller Glen, published in 1854 by Phillips, Sampson and Company in Boston, and by J. C. Derby in New York City.³

Certainly, the novel had some significative meaning; otherwise the Blisses would not have singled it out for special mention in their inventory. Unfortunately, their reasons for the novel's special mention cannot be firmly established, for there are no known letters, diaries or account

books that might identify *Isabel Carrollton*'s importance. The Bliss's rationale for the book's listing died along with William's last child in 1921.

Without any firm documentation as to its listing by title, the possible meanings of *Isabel Carrollton* to Bliss or his family are limited only by our own imaginations. For examples, the book might have been a gift from a relative or a dear friend, a presentation copy from the writer, or it might have contained some special recipe or romantic poem, written on a fly leaf, that was cherished by some member of the Bliss family. Moreover, neither do we know to whom in the family the book was significant nor when and where it was acquired.

Secondly, the author's identity may be of significance, but if so, it cannot be firmly established; it is as mysterious as the rationale for the book's listing. Kneller Glen probably was not a voluminous writer. Apparently, the novelist published only one book and as a result little is known about the author.⁴ The style of writing and several references and philosophies expounded within *Isabel Carrollton*, especially concerning the battle of the sexes, suggest that the author was a woman and that Kneller Glen was a pen name, a common practice during the nineteenth century. The possibility also exists that Glen may have been a friend of the Bliss family or a relative. Conceivably, as we will hypothesize, Glen may have been one of William's daughters.

A further hindrance to the unraveling of *Isabel Carrollton*'s significance relates to its obscure publication history. The sparse information on Glen and the novel suggests that it was not a popular book and did not sell many copies; probably, it was not read by a broad contemporary audience. Nevertheless, the editors at Phillips, Sampson and Company believed it had some merit. Likely, *Isabel Carrollton* contains a generic story line for a mid-nineteenth century novel, filled with stock characters and settings and situations with which contemporary readers could identify. Glen's book is possibly analogous to the inexpensive paperback romance novel of today, available in pharmacies, department stores and groceries.

Nonetheless, *Isabel Carrollton* was especially important to at least one member of the Bliss family; otherwise, it would not have been mentioned in the inventory. With the lack of crucial information on the book, we find ourselves haunted by the nagging question: Why was the novel singled out and listed by title in the inventory? Upon reading the book, and researching the life of William Bliss, some intriguing parallels between the latter and the book and several coincidences were found.

The Fiction

The story of *Isabel Carrollton* is set in rural Massachusetts and the Green Mountains of Vermont. It recounts a six-year period of the trials and tribulations of a young woman, Isabel or "Bel" Carrollton, who is orphaned at the tender age of sixteen by the death of her mother. With her parents gone, Isabel lives with her cousin Mary and aunt and uncle Otis, who own "the most prettiest cottage and the most flourishing store" in a rural Massachusetts town.⁵

However, tragedy strikes the Otis family. Mary, a close confidant of Isabel, is crippled in a bad carriage accident and her beau leaves her and moves to the West. Isabel is there to pull her through her depression. However, "Misfortunes never come singly."⁶ Uncle Otis, who had invested in two stone mills, is nearly whiped out in a sheriff's sale. The receipts did not cover all of the debts, so the family home and store also had to be sold.

Bel decides "to acquire a situation" where she could raise the needed funds for an operation that would enable Mary to walk normally. With the assistance of the Otis family physician, Isabel moves in with the doctor's sister and her husband, the Gunnersons, and enters the teaching profession. Isabel meets several new characters including Arthur Livingston who operates a store in town.

As summer passes, Mr. Livingston falls in love with Bel. Although at first she is disinterested, an incident at a rural picnic changes her attitude. Livingston reveals his romantic interest in her, and after Bel's initial rejection, he continues to pursue her affections.

But tragedy again strikes Bel and the Gunnerson family. The same night of a tea social, a spark from Mr. Gunnerson's pipe ignites a fire that totally destroys the Gunnerson home, and in which Isabel, overcome by smoke, is saved by Mr. Livingston. For his bravery, however, he nearly dies from typhus.

During her beau's convalescence, Bel becomes apprehensive concerning Livingston's marriage proposal. Melodramatically, Bel's dream of marital bliss is shattered at a tender moment by the arrival of Cornelia, Livingston's wife! Overcome with horror, disbelief and embarrassment, Bel hurriedly packs her bags and returns to the Otis home.

Misery follows. After her return, Isabel's constitution wanes, and she is diagnosed as having a "brain fever." Bel's condition necessitates the shaving of her head, the application of leeches, and the administration of opiates. Fortunately before she becomes addicted, Isabel is weaned off the narcotic. As she recovers, a letter from Mr. Livingston arrives, which she returns to the sender unopened.

Nonetheless, the luck of the Otis family and Mary changes. A letter arrives from Mr. Otis's ex-business partner in California, with a draft for \$1,000. Eventually, Mary undergoes the corrective surgery and walks normally again, and her beau returns and proposes marriage. Later, another friend, Blanche Glenmore, tells Bel of her betrothal.

But Bel's luck does not change. She discovers that her Uncle Otis had resolved to "pull up stakes," as the country phrase goes, and build for himself a new home near [Mary's] future abode,"⁷ and later, Blanche writes to Bel stating that her husband also has decided to move away.

By "May-day," and on the verge of being abandoned by family and friends, Bel receives a letter from an admirer. Although she does not love him, she contemplates his proposal: "It was, that this might be my last chance matrimonial."⁸

At the deepest part of her depression and isolation, Mr. Livingston re-enters Bel's life. Although she is torn between her love and revulsion for the man, Isabel listens to his story of woe, and he reveals his troubled childhood, and the annulment of his marriage. With these disclosures, Isabel and Mary and their respective beaux are married during a double ceremony.

Writing three years later, Isabel reports that her years of marriage, which included the birth of little Arthur, were the happiest in her life. Concluding the narrative, Isabel writes, "Not that I have been entirely exempt from pain and sorrow, for all that time; - who that is mortal suffereth not? - but my pathway has been constantly smoothed by the hand of affection, and a strong arm has been ever ready to aid me in passing through life's unavoidable trials."⁹

Isabel's last statement may offer the attitude or the words of encouragement that the Bliss family member recalled as the entry "Isabella Carrollton" was added to the battle-loss inventory. Nonetheless, could other events, characters, settings and philosophies of life expounded in the novel have been biographical of the Bliss family?

The Reality

William Bliss, the youngest of four boys and seven girls, was born in the fall of 1799 to Doctor James and Hannah Guild Bliss of Rehoboth, Bristol county, Massachusetts. His father, a veteran of the Revolution, served the community not only as a competent physician but also as a farmer and innkeeper.¹⁰

Tragedy struck William's life early, for at the age of seventeen his mother passed away in the fall of 1816. Dr. Bliss, remarried a short time

thereafter, and although William was a teenager at the time, an additional seven years passed before Cupid's arrow speared the young man. In the spring of 1823, he married Adeline Carpenter on her twenty-third birthday. Within two years, the newly weds were blessed with two daughters, Amanda and Sarah.¹¹

By 1826 William decided to lead his young family to greener pastures, and hearing of virgin farm lands in north-central Pennsylvania, the Bliss family moved west to Bradford county by March 1828. Their third daughter, Adeline Elizabeth Bliss, was born at Warren Center on the 23rd. A week before that Christmas, William purchased a modest farm within the old Rhode Island Tract in what would become Warren township. Two years later, William and Adeline were blessed with their first son, James William.¹²

Wanderlust again struck the Bliss family, for they decided to continue the migration westward. In the spring of 1831, William sold his farm, and sometime before 8 June 1832, they moved to the town* of Gerry (pronounced Geary), Chautauqua county, New York: their fourth daughter, France, was born there that day.¹³

In 1835, William received word that his father had passed away at the ripe, old age of seventy-eight. We suspect that William left his family in New York and returned to Massachusetts to claim part of his father's estate which had been assessed at approximately \$25,400 and included an interest in a mill. Possibly a short time after William's return from Massachusetts, he purchased a 100-acre farm just southeast of the village of Sinclairville, located near the northern border of Gerry town. There, the Bliss family resided for the next twenty and a half years, during which William twice served as a township supervisor.¹⁴

But death continued to stalk the Bliss household: James died at the age of five in 1835; two years later, an infant son, born 23 February 1837, passed away seventeen days later; and in 1846 their oldest child, Amanda, died. Despite these personal tragedies, the remaining family members persevered, working their farm in central Chautauqua county.¹⁵

By the 1850s life in upstate New York, for some reason, no longer appealed to Bliss and his family, and they decided to move once more. Selling his farm on 2 July 1856, and probably following the marriage of daughter Adeline (aged twenty-eight years) to a Daniel B. Harris of Union

* What is referred to in Chautauqua and Bristol counties as a "town," actually represents a governmental entity known in Pennsylvania as a township. In some cases a village within a town may have the same name, such as Rehoboth, Massachusetts.

City, Erie county, Pennsylvania, on 21 October, the Bliss family migrated to the bustling market town of Gettysburg. In April 1857, he purchased a fifty-three-acre farm south of town, buying an additional seven acres the following year.¹⁶

Sometime in 1859, their daughter Adeline made an extended visit, for on 11 January 1860, Bliss's second grandchild, Esther *Isabel* Harris, was born, probably on the family farm. Thus, at the age of sixty, William and his family had established roots in Pennsylvania. But they had no way of knowing that three years thence the grand course of human events would leave them practically destitute.¹⁷

Comparative Analysis

Possibly, the book was written by William Bliss or even by one of his daughters. But even if it had not been, as the family prepared its damage claim during the latter part of July 1863, they would have been stupefied at the irony of how a fiction, written (and possibly written by one of them) a decade earlier, seemed to predict the fortunes of the Bliss family.

The author's name, *Kneller Glenn*, could well allude to the Bliss family and its trials. Professor James P. Myers, Jr., of Gettysburg College speculates that the name of the novel's principal character, *Isabel*, might be an anagram, or rearrangement, of the letters of William Bliss's daughter's name, *A. E. Bliss*. And, indeed, with possible significance, Adeline and Daniel's child, born at Gettysburg, was given the same middle name, *Isabel*. *Carollton* may express a punning combination of the words *carol* and *tune* or *tone*. A "carol" is a joyful or *bliss*-ful tune; and a tune may be an ode, a story set to music. The author's first name *Kneller* might suggest the opposite of *bliss*: a *kneller* is one who sounds or rings a *knell*, that is, a tolling of bells or sounding of a tune announcing death, failure, or tribulation. The word *glen* denotes a secluded and narrow mountain valley. This combining the words and their meanings may suggest, then, the sad and joyous story of William (or A. E.) Bliss in the secluded mountain glen wherein Sinclairsville and the Bliss family farm nestled in upstate New York. Moreover, William or Adeline E. might have also relied on Bliss family stories to embellish the plot and develop characters. Unfortunately, we have no other corroborative documentation to confirm that one of the Blisses, William or A. E., wrote *Isabel Carrolton*.

The prominent event that ties fact and fiction together is the loss of possessions in a devastating fire. When Isabel Carollton moved to the Gunnerson home, Mr. Gunnerson indicated that the school where she was to teach had been housed in an old doctor's office which had "burnt

down.”¹⁸ Later, when Isabel barely escaped death in a house fire, Mr. Gunnerson commented to her as they watched their happy home being engulfed in flames: “There, now you can have a fair view on’t . . . and I hope you’ll never see your own home in the same sitewation [sic]; for it makes a man feel blue as a whetstone to see the fire a-eatin’ up all his property, an’ no knowin’ where any more’s to come from.”¹⁹

Though house fires were a common threat in that era before safer, more efficient means of heating and cooking had been developed, undoubtedly, the novel’s emotions anticipated those of the Bliss family when their eyes beheld the smoldering ruins of their Gettysburg farm. However, we do not know if the destruction of their farm in 1863 was the only trial by fire the Bliss family had endured.

The passage where Uncle Otis realized that many of his material possessions had to be sold to cover the debt incurred by the mill failures may have sparked memories in William or his family members as they sat preparing their inventory:

Every article of furniture, not absolutely essential to our comfort, every painting, pier-table, lounge, and even my aunt’s gold watch and chain, had been disposed of [or is the case of the Bliss family, destroyed in the fire at Gettysburg]. Not a single luxury . . . was retained.²⁰

Indeed, the Bliss family lost articles of furniture, clothing, and family memorabilia such as a “county map, Profiles, and Six Ambyotypes [sic] and Tintypes” in the flames that muggy July morning.²¹

A second close tie between fact and fiction involves the character of Uncle Otis. To the Blisses, Uncle Otis may have resembled (or was patterned after?) Dr. James Bliss, with a family of eleven children:

one of the most kind-hearted and good-tempered men. [William may have] found in him a willing listener to all [his children’s] little grievances . . . who acted as umpire, in matters of dispute . . . ; so skillfully adjusting [their] difficulties, as not to effect an amicable settlement, but leaving both parties satisfied with each other and with the result of his arbitration. He was much respected and *looked up* to by the residents of [his] village. [Uncle Otis] was now justice of the peace, and had been for several successive years elected senator to the [Massachusetts] state legislature, until he had declined a further nomination; his business having been gradually extending itself until it left him little time for the performance of his public duties.²² [Glen’s Emphasis]

Besides being an innkeeper and one of the leading physicians in Rehoboth, Dr. Bliss was prominent in the First Congressional Society, serving as the clerk for the trustees for many years, and was Rehoboth's representative to the General Court of Massachusetts during 1815, 1816, and 1820. During one stormy session, Dr. Bliss was one of the more compromising and calmer mediators. As Leonard Bliss, Jr., wrote of his late grandfather in 1836, James "was a man of sound judgement, strict integrity, and great industry and economy."²³

Further parallels between *Isabel Carollton* and the lives and experiences of the Bliss family members are more tenuous and possibly coincidental. Personalities, events and settings in the novel probably were commonplace during the nineteenth-century, as they could be today. However, as seen through the eyes of the Blisses to whom the book held some significance, the following characterizations, events and settings—though generic—may have had some socio-psychological significance, and coupled with the house fire and the Uncle Otis character in the book, these 'coincidences' may have reenforced *Isabel Carollton's* significative meaning.

As Isabel's dear, departed mother lay on her death bed, Dr. Smythe comforted Bel by stating that "This earthen casket is no longer valuable, excepting as a memento of the priceless jewel it once contained."²⁴ Later, as her mother was "laid beneath the cold, damp soil of the village churchyard, [Isabel] thought, in [her] youthful inexperience, that [she] should never be happy again; that [her] whole life would be filled with grief for [her] irreparable loss."²⁵ These emotions may have been identical to those of William, when at the age of seventeen (fifteen for Isabel) standing at the village cemetery in Rehoboth, he witnessed the burial of his own dear, departed mother, Hannah. She possibly "had been to [William] everything, — teacher, companion guide."²⁶ These same emotions may have been rekindled at the Evergreen Cemetery in Sinclairsville, New York, where William and his wife buried three of their six children over an eleven-year period.

When Uncle Otis is forced to sell the "cottage" after the mill failures, Bel reminisces over the fifteen years of memories that were to be left behind. The following passage may have rekindled memories in William and Adeline of the Bliss homestead in Rehoboth:

. . . I remember still the sadness of my parting from my childhood home. The room where my mother had breathed her last words of undying tenderness, seemed ever haunted by her presence. The very garden, trees, and shrubs, I had learned to look upon as friends. Even the little limpid brook, that flowed at the foot of the sloping lawn

behind the house where my cousin and myself . . . had caught tiny "pin-fish" and placed in artificial ponds of our own construction. . . . , murmured regretfully, and a passing cloud overshadowed its face as it reflected my tearful, farewell glance.²⁷

Indeed, today behind the suspected site of the Bliss house, which is surrounded by forest, a lawn gently slopes down to a stream that is deep enough to support small fish.²⁸ Further reinforcing Glen's imagery, the Bliss's farmhouses in Gerry and Gettysburg were situated on rises of ground surrounded by open meadows and farm fields. At Gettysburg, however, the lawn in front of their home sloped down to the headwaters of Stevens Run, and nearby were shrubs, a garden, and a ten-acre orchard of apple, cherry and peach trees.²⁹

The setting of the Gunnerson home in Vermont, though Glen's description probably suggests an infinite number of locales, also describes the setting in Bradford county, Pennsylvania, or Sinclairsville, New York, at the site of William Bliss's farm:

The situation [there, is] elevated and airy. . . . [T]he eye [sweeps] over an extensive prospect, bounded in the distance by irregular summits. Beautiful little mossy dells, almost hidden by their verdant banks and overhanging shrubbery; deep, sheltered woodlands, here and there seen through budding branches of the trees, and illuminated by light as soft and as pure as that shining through alabaster, - all combin[ing] to form a varied landscape whose beauty delighted [Isabel].³⁰

When she arrived at the Gunnerson home, Bel . . .

hurried to the windows of [her] room, hoping to be greeted by a prospect of gently undulating fields, green and grassy meadows, or graceful waving woodlands. [She] could not refrain from an exclamation of disappointment, as [her] eyes rested upon a huge woodpile, shutting out the charming *utopian* landscape beyond. [Glen's Emphasis]³¹

This may well have been the reaction of the Bliss children as they viewed their new home in New York or at Gettysburg. Though woodpiles would be common around any messuage during the nineteenth century, several Union troops who fought about the Bliss house near Gettysburg recalled a sizable woodpile in the farmyard.³² When the Bliss family moved into their new home during the spring of 1857, a similar wood pile may have been located in front of one of the windows, blocking the

“utopian landscape” of Seminary Ridge and the South Mountain off to the west.

The rural picnic in the novel may have held some special meaning to the Bliss family. As Livingston waited for Isabel, he examined her portfolio of pencil-sketches and requested that she make one

of a most romantically-situated cottage, in a secluded mountain glen, not far from where [they] were going . . .

Half and hour’s rapid drive brought [them] to the festive scene, a thickly-wooded grove of trees, where hundreds were already assembled. Music from an invisible band floated on the air, or reverberated from the lofty brows of grim old rocks, among the trembling leaves of the stunted trees, that clung trustingly to the flinty protectors whence they derived their scant sustenance . . .

Nearly at the foot of the gently sloping glen . . . stood a small rustic cottage, whose smoke-wreaths were curling in fantastic cloud-shapes through the thick foliage that screened it from the fiercer rays of the noontide sun. A narrow limpid stream still further down, wound, with soft liquid murmurs, through the alders and fern that sometimes entirely concealed it from [their] view. Groups of cows reclined lazily in the shady nooks of the pasture, while, occasionally, one stood quietly ruminating in the pellucid waters. On the opposite hill-side a flock of sheep were nibbling their accustomed herbage.³³

Though this rustic scene may have been reminiscent of many rural areas, the description also generally fits that of the Spangler’s Spring and meadow area, historically one of the popular picnic spots near Gettysburg in the nineteenth-century, about two miles (or a half an hour’s drive) from the Bliss Farm. However, during the 1860s the spring area was mostly open pasture. Nevertheless, across Rock Creek and within sight of Spangler’s Spring stood the Zachariah Tawney farm, situated low on the mostly wooded western slope of Wolf Hill.

Another local attraction, about two miles south of the Bliss farmstead was Devil’s Den. The large rocks, tree-covered summits of the Round Tops, Plum Run meandering down the valley between the hills and rocky crags, and the not-so-romantic Slyder farmstead—situated in a glen a short distance from the den along the stream—parallels Isabel’s description. Until recently, the National Park Service permitted local farmers to graze cows and occasionally sheep on the hillsides, lapping the waters of the famous “Bloody Run” in the “Valley of Death.” Although the western face of Little Round Top has been cleared of trees, as it was at the time of the battle, until the early months of 1863 the western face was covered with trees, where “Groups of cows [could recline] lazily in

the shady nooks of the pasture.” Moreover, someone in the Bliss family may have been an artist, for a descendant of William Bliss has a photograph of a water-color painting of the Bliss Farm at Gettysburg allegedly found in a relative’s attic.³⁴

Possible reasons for the Bliss’s migratory wanderings may also be found in the novel. When Blanche Glenmore spent the summer at the Otis home, her condition was described as being

very delicate, and seem[ed] to be constantly becoming more so. Her physician [told Mr. Glenmore] that it [was] of vital importance that she should leave the city, for the present, to escape the east winds and the chill, bracing sea-air so frequently prejudicial to health.³⁵

Though the Blisses possibly moved to acquire better farm lands and opportunities, they may have migrated because of the adverse effects that the damp sea air of Rehoboth or the cold winters in upstate Pennsylvania and New York had on the health of a family member. Indeed, in escorting descendents of Daniel and Adeline E. (Bliss) Harris around the battlefield during the summer of 1990, the author recalls Robert C. Harris showing him a photocopy of a photograph of Frances Bliss, on the backside of which was an inscription claiming that Bliss moved his family from New York due to the cold weather. In *Isabel Carrollton*, Livingston’s life hung in the balance for twenty-two days before he recovered from typhus; William and Adeline’s unnamed son was not as fortunate: he lived only seventeen days, dying during some of the coldest weather in Chautauqua county, New York, history.³⁶ Could someone in the Bliss family, after reading about Livingston’s recovery, have pondered: if only our son (or brother) could have survived five more days, he may have survived altogether?

Fatal illnesses were common during the nineteenth-century, although the mortality rate was declining. Many contemporary novels alluded to the “Grim Reaper” and offered words of encouragement and renewed faith. *Isabel Carrollton* may also have served the Blisses as a therapeutic, self-help book, ‘a bridge over troubled waters.’

After Mary’s crippling carriage accident and her beau’s, Charles Merritt’s, moving to the far west, her depression threatened to overwhelm her. Isabel rejuvenated her outlook on life:

“Do cheer up . . . ; you know it is always darkest before daybreak . . . Don’t give way so to sorrow. . . [God] loves us and would not needlessly afflict us. . . . Think, too, how tenderly youth father and mother love you, and how unhappy every sorrow you endure makes them. . . .”³⁷

However, May replied with darker, foreboding thoughts:

“Why should I wish to live? I shall never be happy myself, or make any one else so. . . . I remember . . . Plato’s opinion about confirmed invalids — ‘Let them die, the sooner, the better.’”

“Pray stop Mary! [exclaimed Isabel] no wonder you are unhappy, with your heart full of such bitter thoughts. Why should you go back to an old heathen philosopher, when we have the Bible to guide us? . . .”

After contemplating Isabel’s words, Mary joined her friend in the parlor, where Isabel read aloud from *Paradise Lost*.³⁸

When Minna Lee’s mother lay dying, she philosophized to Isabel on her approaching death:

“Our divine father . . . never permits our trials to exceed our powers of endurance. I do not believe any one can view, at a distance, the mysterious ‘king of terrors’ [death?] without shrinking in dread and awe, from his nearer approach; but have gone through the last great conflict, not only without fear, but filled with joy at the prospect of a *blissful* immortality.” [Emphasis added]³⁹

With the deaths of William’s parents and three children, the financial and emotional consequences resulting from the obliteration of his farmstead at Gettysburg and other previous crises, these passage might have eased the weary minds of William and his family. The author’s inspirational philosophy expounded in the novel, coupled with the biographical events and personalities contained therein, might have established a psychological bond between the Blissess and Isabel and other characters in the fiction. As the Bliss family prepared their inventory, during that hot, depressing July of 1863, possibly they recalled the title because of psychological affinities and similarities between the novel’s and their own situations. We can speculate further: was a birth defect, a crippling accident, or a disastrous love affair the reason why Frances and Sarah Bliss never married? Without solid documentation to the contrary, they remain possibilities.

We can correlate some character names in the novel to actual contemporary personalities, though the Blissess probably never have any connections, for the personalities are post-novel. Nevertheless, the coincidences tease us today like *déjà vu*. The author created in Isabel’s world an Uncle Rehoboan (Rehoboth) and a Sally Mudgit (Sally or Sarah being the name of William’s stepmother, one of his sisters, and a daughter). The names of William’s daughter Amanda and his brother George also appeared in the story. Character names also seem to allude

to contemporary military commanders. There is Minna Lee (Robert E. Lee), Miss Howard (Oliver *Otis* Howard, commander of the Union 11th Corps at Gettysburg and Uncle Otis), Mrs. Grant (Ulysses S. Grant), Charles Merritt (Wesley Merritt, commander of a Union cavalry brigade that fought on the southern end of the Gettysburg battlefield), and Miss Welles (Major *William* Wells, of the 1st *Vermont* Cavalry, involved in the ill-fated Farnsworth's Charge on the *Slyder Farm near Devil's Den*. Probably the most suggestive and ironic coincidence between fact and fiction was the naming of the Carrollton and Otis family physician, kindly old Dr. Smythe who tried his best to help those in need. As a twist of "Fate," it was men of the 14th Connecticut Regiment who torched the Bliss Farm at Gettysburg, and their brigade commander was a native-born Irishman, Colonel Thomas A. *Smyth*.

These are but a few possible psychological significant meanings, parallels and coincidences found between, on the one hand, Kneller Glen's fiction, the trials and tribulations of a young nineteenth-century girl, and on the other, fact, the life and times of the Bliss family. By comparing the story line, characterizations and settings of *Isabel Carrollton* with the little information that has been uncovered concerning the Blisses, the possible socio-psychological parallels tease the modern reader. Although we may never know the true importance of *Isabel Carrollton* to the Blisses, the foregoing comparisons raise several searching questions, taunting us over a century of time.

Apart from these possibilities, the comparative analysis has given us a small personal peek into the day-to-day life of the Bliss family and their possible inter-family relationships. We can almost feel their anguish and despair as they prepared their damage claim. Estimating their library at one hundred volumes, they recalled the one book that perhaps may have helped them through earlier troubled times, and perhaps they marveled how the fiction was as real as anything in their lives, as though two separate universes had become one. Perhaps astonished at the similarities between fact and fiction, they may have prayed to a divine spirit, asking why such adversity had befallen the family, wishing they could read *Isabel Carrollton* once more to help them through another tragic chapter of life.

Notes

1. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of the Auditor-General, Damage Claims under the Acts of April 23, 1863, April 9, 1869, and May 27, 1871, Adams County Historical Society (cited hereafter as ACHS). On microfilm, Gettysburg, Pa. (ACHS). See claim filed by William Bliss dated July 29, 1863.

2. See Elwood W. Christ, "A Study of the Historic William Bliss Farm Destroyed During the Battle at Gettysburg July 3, 1863: An Overview of his Family, A Hypothetical Description of Farm Buildings and A Preliminary Analysis of the Material Culture of An Atypical Adams County Farmer," an unpublished paper submitted to Dr. Simon Bronner for credit in the Masters Program in American Studies, Pennsylvania State University, Capitol College, December 14, 1987.

3. Kneller Glen, *Isabel Carrollton: A Personal Retrospect* (Sampson and Company, 1854).

4. National Union Catalogue Pre-1956 Imprints (London, 1972), 202:240. Only one book is listed under the name, "Kneller Glen."

5. *Isabel Carrollton.*, p. 8.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 295.2

8. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 339-40.

10. James N. Arnold, *Vital Records of Rehoboth, 1642-1896: Marriages, Intentions, Births, Deaths, Deaths With Supplements Containing the Records of 1896, Colonial Returns, Lists of the Early Settlers, Purchases, Freeman Inhabitants, the Soldiers Serving in Phillip's War and the Revolution* (Providence, R.I., 1897), p. 539; Leonard Bliss, Jr., *History of Rehoboth, Bristol County, Massachusetts: Comprising a History of the Present Towns of Rehoboth, Seekonk, and Pawtucket from Their Settlement to the Present Time, together with Sketches of Attleborough, Cumberland and Part of Swansey and Barrington to the Time that They Separated from the Original Town* (Boston, 1836), p. 274; and Richard LeBaron Bowen, *Early Rehoboth: Documented Historical Studies of Families and Events in Plymouth Township, 4 Volumes* (Concord, Mass., 1945), 1:48f,

2:122, 4:21, 24, 32, 145. A twelfth child was born after William, but died unnamed. See Aaron Tyler Bliss, compiler, *Genealogy of the Bliss Family in America*. 3 Vols. (Midland, MI., 1982), 1:244.

11. Aaron Bliss, *Bliss Family in America*, 1:243; Leonard Bliss, Jr., *History of Rehoboth*, p. 274; and Arnold, *Vital Records*, pp. 37 and 543.

12. Aaron Bliss, *Bliss Family in America*, 1:243 & 494; Bradford County, Pennsylvania, Office of the Register and Recorder, Towanda, Deeds Records, Deed Book 8:178; and *Map of the Providence, Rhode Island Tract, circa 1830*, Copy in possession (1987) of Jeffrey W. Geiss, land surveyor, George K. Jones Associates, 1 Popular Street., Towanda, Pa. William may have learned of farming opportunities in Pennsylvania from his sister, Hannah, and her husband, William Bullock, who also moved to Warren Center, Bradford County. However, it is not known whether the Bullocks moved before, with or after William Bliss and his family.

13. Aaron Bliss, *Bliss Family in America*, 1:494; and Bradford County, Deed Book 9:325.

14. Dr. James Bliss tombstone, Village Cemetery, Bay State Road, Rehoboth, Bristol County, Massachusetts; Bristol County, Probate Registry, Books 74:434 & 479, and 75:343; 3rd U.S. Census, 1830, Warren Township, Bradford County, Pennsylvania. Also see Bristol County, Deed Book 146:413 & 485. The deed found on page 413 implies that William Bliss was physically present in Massachusetts; and Chautaugua County, New York (Deed Records, Mayville, Deed Book 16:428). It should be noted here that the governmental bodies referred to as "Towns" in Massachusetts and upstate New York are usually called townships in other locales. They are not to be confused with "Villages" by the same name.

15. *William Bliss Family Memorial*, Evergreen Cemetery, Sinclairville, Town of Charlotte, Chautauqua County, New York and Aaron Bliss, *Bliss Family in America*, 1:494.

16. Chautaugua County, Deed Book 82:477; Aaron Bliss, *Bliss Family in*

America, 1:494; and Adams County, Pennsylvania, Office of the Register and Recorder, Gettysburg, Deed Book U:80 (52.99 acres) and U:218 (7.30 acres).

17. Aaron Bliss, *Bliss Family in America*, 1:494.

18. Glen, *Isabel Carrollton*, p. 148.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

21. Bliss Damage Claims.

22. Glen, *Isabel Carrollton*, pp. 7-8.

23. Rev. George F. Tilton, A. M., *A History of Rehoboth, Massachusetts: Its History For 215 Years, 1643-1918 in Which Is Incorporated the Vital Parts of the Original History of the Town, Published in 1836, and Written By Leonard Bliss, Jr.* (Boston, 1918), pp. 322-3; and Bliss, *History of Rehoboth*, pp. 169, 274.

24. Glen, *Isabel Carrollton*, p. 6.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Glen, *Isabel Carrollton*, p. 132.

28. Arnold, *Vital Records*, p. 539; Leonard Bliss, Jr., *History of Rehoboth*, p. 274; and Bowen, *Early Rehoboth*, 1:48f, 2:122, 4:21, 24, 32, & 145. The author visited Rehoboth, Massachusetts in April, 1986 and located the site of the James Bliss home, the old Timothy Redaway Farm. Today, the site is situated 200 yards west of Route 44 on Bay State Road, half a mile west of old Rehoboth center and the Village Cemetery. It is not known whether the structure on site is the original Bliss home or tavern.

29. George D. Bowen, "Diary of Captain George D. Bowen," *Valley Forge Journal*:

A Record of Patriotism and Culture (Valley Forge, June 1984), 11:128-129, and *Gettysburg Republican Compiler*, Monday, August 11, 1856, p. 3, col. 4.

30. Glen, *Isabel Carrollton*, p. 48.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

32. Henry S. Stevens, *Souvenir of Excursions to the Battlefields by the Society of the Fourteenth Connecticut Regiment and Reunion at Antietam September 1891: With History and Reminiscences of Battles and Campaigns of the Regiment on the Fields Revisited* (Washington, D.C., 1893), pp. 19-20, 21.

33. Glen, *Isabel Carrollton*, pp. 77-8.

34. Photographic of a water color painting of the William Bliss Farm at Gettysburg. (Photo on file, Gettysburg National Military Park Library.) In a conversation with the park historian, Kathy Georg Harrison in March 1989, the author learned that the photograph was donated by a Mr. David Harris, 50 Duane Road, Doylestown, Pa. 18901, who claimed he was a descendant of Bliss. Allegedly, a photograph of the original painting was found in his aunt's attic ca. 1979.

35. Glen, *Isabel Carrollton*, p. 12.

36. *History of Chautauqua County, New York and Its People*, John P. Downs and Fenwick Y. Hedley, eds. (Boston, 1921), 2 Volumes, 1:51 and Andrew W. Young, *History of Chautauqua County, New York: From Its First Settlement to the Present Time* (Buffalo, 1875), p. 400.

37. Glen, *Isabel Carrollton*, p. 26.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 67.