

HENRY WATTERSON, THE COINCIDENTAL REDEEMER

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In southern history, the period between 1870 and 1900 has generally been labeled the "New South" era. In discussing the personalities and happenings of those decades, historians have accepted the term Redeemer, popularized by Comer Vann Woodward, to describe the industrially oriented individuals who participated in southern regeneration. In using a general term to typify the New Order hierarchy, Woodward and other researchers passed over the various characteristics that separate some of the leaders from their contemporaries. Such is the case of Henry Watterson, the famous editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal for over fifty years. The purpose of this paper is to show that although Watterson was considered a major spokesman of the New South doctrines, he was merely preaching a gospel imparted to him by his heritage. He was a Redeemer by coincidence and not by conversion, as were his fellow journalists, espousing a philosophy typical of pre-Civil War conservatives.

Major sources for this thesis center around books

and articles written by or on Watterson. Especially helpful were Watterson's Marse Henry, An Autobiography, 2 volumes; The Compromises of Life; and Arthur Krock's The Editorials of Henry Watterson. Over twenty articles written by the Kentucky editor were also employed. The main secondary sources consulted were Joseph F. Wall's Henry Watterson, Reconstructed Rebel; Isaac F. Marcossou's Marse Henry, A Biography of Henry Watterson; and Woodward's Origins of the New South.

The paper examines the three primary areas of tariff reform, the silver issue, and industrial promotion, in order to substantiate its statement that Watterson remained true to the philosophy of his heritage. Watterson wrote and lectured extensively on all three subjects. In one instance, tariff reform, the editor differed with the generally accepted protectionist ideas held by other Redeemers. In the other two areas his thoughts paralleled the New Order gospel.

The major conclusion of this thesis is that Henry Watterson, while representative of the Redeemer element, was the product of a Jacksonian, rather than a Whig, heritage which had an ideology quite similar to the Redeemer appeal. In determining his exact

philosophy the study shows that the editor was quite different from his contemporaries in the New South in both the substance and integrity of his beliefs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although he has been classified as one of the major Redeemers in the New South order, Henry Watterson, the fiery, sometimes prosaic editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal, mainly demonstrated allegiance to his own standards. Even when his preachments paralleled the gospel espoused by the Redeemer element, Watterson's beliefs were more a product of his upbringing than the result of the expansive mood that gripped the southern hierarchy after 1870. His advocacy of southern regeneration interfered little with his various political stances.

Because he was so outspoken on so many subjects associated with the Redeemers, Watterson has suffered the misfortune of being classified as a mere mouthpiece for the New Order. Slight regard has been given to the editor's political heritage by southern historians such as Comer Vann Woodward. What has been assumed as the propaganda of a Redeemer editor was

actually Watterson's conservative, Jacksonian philosophy asserting itself in the age of rebirth.

A sampling of the core of the Redeemer leadership reveals an "ill-defined" group of southerners who gained control of the reconstructed states during the 1870's. General John B. Gordon, a member of Georgia's ruling Triumvirate, was considered the incarnation of "the Lost Cause." Florida's governor was George Drew, a native of New Hampshire and an old-line Whig. Isham G. Harris, a secessionist and southern war leader, stood for Tennessee in the Senate during the rise of the New South. "In the main they [the Redeemers] were of middle-class, industrial, capitalistic outlook, with little but a nominal connection with the old planter regime."¹

Because this definition accurately depicts Watterson, it is important to realize that he was a piece of the mold, and not just a part of the mixture underlying the foundation of the New South. By

¹Comer Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, Vol. IX of A History of the South, edited by Ellis Merton Coulter and Wendell Holmes Stephenson (Baton Rouge, 1967), 17-20.

coincidence, and not conversion, Watterson's Jacksonian precepts fitted easily into the picture presented by the South's New Order.

Watterson's influence on the political scene was more ephemeral than contemporary biographers have wished to admit. Except in the realm of tariff reform, he never dented the ranks of the politically effective, those individuals who parlayed the Democratic Party into the loser's corner during the last fifty years of the nineteenth century. The Watterson charisma was built more on the vast popularity the man garnered through the columns of the Courier-Journal. The editor's conciliatory attitude toward the North, his lukewarm support of all Democratic presidential candidates except Samuel J. Tilden of New York, and his loyalty to certain beliefs despite political winds, probably served to keep him out of office in Kentucky as well as on the national level.

Although he fought for Tennessee during the war, Watterson editorially advocated reconciliation of the nation's sections as early as 1868. With circumspection he commented, "There can be no peace as long as the

North allows itself to look on the South either as a quasibelligerent, or as a conquered province. That is not the road to peace. There must be a spirit of mutual forgiveness."² He sounded like the Redeemer prototype when, in disparaging sectionalism, he wrote, "vicious agitation leads inevitably to loss of business, public confidence, and credit, [and] threatens the demolition of either liberty or property, and oftenest of both."³ But, it must be explained that Watterson came from a family possessing both strong union ties and a deep affection for the rights of property. A Redeemer appeal, but also the reasoning of an individual raised with Yankee notions.

An examination of Watterson's position on the tariff and money questions of the era substantiates the statement that he remained true to the philosophies with which he entered the Louisville scene in 1870. Furthermore, a survey of available information indicates that Watterson, a steadfast advocate of southern industrial expansion,

² Arthur Krock, editor, The Editorials of Henry Watterson (New York, 1923), p. 19.

³ Henry Watterson, "The Solid South," North American Review, CXXVIII (January, 1879), 58.

mainly related his promotional columns to those endeavors that would benefit Louisville.

The product of a political, semi-industrial background, Watterson espoused some New South doctrines in his paper. Throughout his years as the voice of the Courier-Journal, the editor never abandoned his precepts, although he shaded them many times. He inherited his conservative gospel from his father, Harvey, an editor and a congressman.⁴ "This father of mine was an undoubting Democrat of the school of Jefferson and Jackson,"⁵ Henry once wrote.

William Watterson, Harvey's father, early in the age of steel rails had sensed the future of the railroad. At the time of his death in 1851 he had amassed a considerable fortune in cotton and had become a prominent figure in the Tennessee railroad movement. Having served on Andrew Jackson's staff during the War of 1812, William had an intimate relationship with the general. This connection, along with his

⁴Henry Fowles Pringle, "Kentucky Bourbon," Scribner's Magazine, XCVII (January, 1935), 12.

⁵Henry Watterson, Marse Henry, An Autobiography, 2 vols. (New York, 1919), I, 25.

wealth, enabled William to secure for Harvey a position in the Tennessee Dynasty. The dynasty provided such powerful political figures as James K. Polk and Aaron Brown, the pre-war governor of Tennessee. Harvey served four terms in Congress, until he entered the newspaper field in the 1840's as a Union Democrat.⁶ For the first twenty years of his life, Henry lived mainly in the nation's capital, serving in his early youth as a Senate page and later as a correspondent for several papers.

Between feuding with the Brown-Polk faction in Tennessee and fighting secession in the middle counties,⁷ Harvey continued to immerse himself in the infant awakening in the South. In addition to handling his father's railroad construction, he also engaged in telegraph ventures with Amos Kendall, a member of President Jackson's kitchen cabinet. Such commercial ventures established William and Harvey as leaders in the

⁶ Isaac Frederick Marcossou, Marse Henry, A Biography of Henry Watterson (New York, 1951), p. 33; see also, Dictionary of American Biography, 22 vols. (New York, 1936), XIX, 551-552.

⁷ Mary Emily Campbell, The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union (New York, 1961), p. 153.

movement for an industrialized South. "As a mere child, Henry heard from both his father and grandfather" the very precepts which he himself would later preach.⁸ "The relationship between government and the economy during the era [was] flexible, governed by no strict doctrines . . .,"⁹ and Watterson absorbed the political atmosphere in which he was reared, developing there his attitudes toward government, the tariff, sound money, and the union.¹⁰

Although he would later rave against Wall Street and extreme reactionaries, Watterson was a conservative at heart.¹¹ A foremost proponent of some New South doctrines, who retained some of the romanticism of bygone days, Watterson wandered in and out of the Redeemers' ranks during the nineteenth century.

⁸ Joseph Frazier Wall, Henry Watterson, Reconstructed Rebel (New York, 1956), p. 10.

⁹ Edward Pessen, Jacksonian America, Society, Personality, and Politics (Homewood, 1969), p. 95. Pessen contends that pre-war politics in Tennessee were controlled by wealthy cliques that normally supported sound money and Jackson's ephemeral tariff stance; see pp. 95 ff.

¹⁰ New York Times, December 23, 1921, p. 12.

¹¹ Pringle, "Kentucky Bourbon," p. 13.

Believing in such southern traditions as the superiority and pureness of southern womanhood and the inferiority of the black,¹² he nevertheless was curiously unaffected by the tragedy of the Civil War. "The heartbreak of certain defeat for the South did not come to him." No word of sorrow or awareness that his civilization was being destroyed can be seen in his writings. "All this was due, no doubt, to his divided loyalty, the fact that he had lived in a border state."¹³

Throughout the 1870's Watterson exhibited his disdain for the old system in the South, writing:

I only know, and to that degree am happy, that slavery is gone with other bag and baggage of an obsolete time; that it is all gone--the wide veranda filled with pleasure-loving folk; the vast estate, without a reason for its existence or a purpose in the future; the system which because it was contented, refused to realize or be impressed by the movements of mankind.¹⁴

Watterson carried his attack on the Bourbon element into the densest aristocratic areas. Alexander H. Stephens, former vice president of the Confederacy,

¹² Henry Watterson, "Oddities of Southern Life," Century Magazine, XXII (April, 1882), 894; The Compromises of Life (New York, 1915), p. 448.

¹³ Pringle, "Kentucky Bourbon," p. 13.

¹⁴ Watterson, Compromises, p. 101.

and Robert Toombs of Georgia were two Bourbons Watterson particularly condemned for their refusal to advocate reconciliation with the North.¹⁵ Editorially he commented, "It is hard to overcome the prejudices of the old system and to adapt ourselves to the exigencies of the new epoch; and yet this is the lesson we must impress upon our children" ¹⁶ His remarks were often caustic. "No wise man can desire to load the next generation with more of the burdens of the present generation than fairly belong to it. This is what the Bourbons are trying to do." ¹⁷ At times Watterson became specific. "He [Toombs] and his friend Stephens are the worst enemies the South ever had, being at once unwise, selfish, conceited, coldhearted, ready at any moment to sacrifice us all" ¹⁸ Another favorite target of his pen was Kentucky Yeoman editor J. Stoddard Johnson, a Bourbon supporter.

¹⁵ Louisville Courier-Journal, September 23, 1870. Watterson's editorials were usually located on p. 2, easily recognized because of his ponderous style.

¹⁶ Krock, Editorials, p. 39.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

The Courier-Journal drove Stoddard out of business in the 1870's.

The Bourbons were not the only recipients of the editor's invective. Watterson also delighted in attacking Colonel Arthur S. Colyar, head of the Whig-industrialist wing of the Democratic Party in Tennessee. Watterson labeled Colyar "an old high-tariff Whig, [who had] not emancipated himself from the crude opinions which prevailed among the shortsighted and narrow minded political economists among whom he grew to manhood."¹⁹ In this instance, Watterson criticized the southern industrial order because of his distaste for the colonel's political beliefs. Colyar, president of the Tennessee Iron and Coal company, was a Greenbacker, a repudiationist, and a partial protectionist, the three leanings most maligned by Watterson.²⁰

As a New Departure Democrat,²¹ Watterson advocated sectional reunification. His program called

¹⁹ Woodward, The New South, p. 2.

²⁰ Woodward, Reunion and Reaction, The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction (Boston, 1951), pp. 27-28.

²¹ Ibid., p. 47.

for forgetting the war and its dead issues from the past; discounting service in the Confederacy as the only test of fitness for office; admission of Negro testimony; acceptance of the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Amendments; and support for state aid to railroads.²² These were partial requirements deemed by Watterson as necessary to achieve southern prosperity. He also adhered to his own creed of what constituted palatable government, a throwback to his upbringing.

Watterson's philosophy consisted of four major premises. According to the editor, the government had no right, either equitable or legal, to tax the people, except to raise money for its own support. Secondly, he insisted on the right of the people to local self-government. His third tenet demanded that the money of the country be good, consisting of "gold and silver and paper, the whole of interchangeable value, each convertible into the other on demand, and freely circulating side by side." Watterson's fourth precept pertained to the rigid and

²²Ellis Merton Coulter, The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky (Chapel Hill, 1926), p. 435.

impartial execution of laws and legislation by the lawmakers and the populace.²³

These principles constituted the foundation of Watterson's political philosophy, a philosophy that was indebted to neither a Grady nor a Tillman. His mentor had been a low tariff, sound money advocate, whose heritage was bequeathed him by his father, a Jacksonian Southerner with strong union sentiments.²⁴ "Of primary importance to him was his belief in the Union . . . It was the Union of 1850 of which he spoke, however, a nation of low tariffs, states' rights, and an honest but essentially weak Federal government."²⁵

²³ Henry Watterson, "The Political Outlook," Forum, XXIV (January, 1898), 577-578.

²⁴ Watterson, Compromises, p. 56.

²⁵ Wall, Reconstructed Rebel, p. 87.

CHAPTER II

TARIFF TENACITY

No crusade ever consumed more of Watterson's passion or penmanship than his fight for low tariffs. The editor espoused the Tennessee frontier Democrat's view on the tariff issue. "Protection, according to his view, was constitutional and desirable so long as it contributed to the common good. It must not however be used to enrich a privileged class at the expense of the people" ¹

Watterson's low tariff stance differed from the position held by his fellow editor Henry Grady, the epitome of the New Order, and the majority of the Redeemer leadership. ² A constant foe of Republican protectionism, Watterson nevertheless refused to be classified as a free trader, stating, "I was never a Free Trader. I stood for a tariff for revenue as the least oppressive and safest support of Government.

¹ Daniel Merritt Robison, Bob Taylor and the Agrarian Revolt in Tennessee (Chapel Hill, 1935), p. 3.

² Marcossou, Marse Henry, p. 27.

The protective system . . . [was] responsible for our unequal distribution of wealth"³

Not even the sound money issue could demand from Watterson the tremendous agitation the tariff question aroused in his editorial endeavors. As the monetary issue began to come to the fore in the 1880's he had, in the interest of tariff reform, straddled the question of inflation. "Being a doctrinaire himself in blaming all economic ills on the protective tariff, he had only contempt for other men who clung tenaciously to another doctrine, cheap money."⁴

As a member of the Free Trade Club of New York,⁵ Watterson had many opportunities to not only write but also to talk about his obsession with the tariff question. Agitation over the issue increased after Reconstruction. Watterson attributed this new interest to the fact that, after the sectional issues of the Civil War and Redemption had been adjusted,

³Watterson, Autobiography, II, 257.

⁴Wall, Reconstructed Rebel, p. 224.

⁵Henry Watterson, "Strange Prophecy About Roosevelt, A Midwinter Fantasy," Cosmopolitan Magazine, XLIV (January, 1908), 308.

the two national parties faced an entirely new set of political exigencies. "There came to each the need for a fresh set of issues. The Republican party seized upon the theory of protection as its mainstay. The Democrats allied themselves to [a] 'tariff for revenue only'."⁶ Although Watterson erred in his assumption concerning the adoption of the protective stance by the Republicans, since it was a vital campaign issue in Pennsylvania in 1860 between the two parties, he refused to follow other Redeemers down the high tariff path.⁷ Herein a major difference surfaced, separating Watterson from the New Order disciples. Unlike so many of the Redeemers who had Whiggish roots,⁸ Watterson felt no allegiance to the self-preservation-of-industry theories believed by his counterparts.

Active at the Democratic nominating conventions from 1872 through 1892, especially on the platform committees, Watterson was an insistent though sometimes

⁶Watterson, "The Political Outlook," p. 569.

⁷Matthew Josephson, The Politicos (New York, 1938), p. 11.

⁸Woodward, The New South, pp. 1-20.

compromising force in the party.⁹ He attributed his free trade notions to ". . . my good friends William B. Allison and James G. Blaine and John Sherman, who, having 'freed the nigger' were 'going to free the trade.'"¹⁰ He was also impressed by the theories of David A. Wells, an influential free trade advocate. Wells, President Andrew Johnson's commissioner of Internal Revenue, strongly believed that the industrial explosion which the United States was experiencing should have bannished tariff barriers, and that allowing the American manufacturer to meet the challenge of foreign goods would benefit the American consumer.¹¹ Watterson considered, as did Wells, the protective tariff a device used by the manufacturer to fleece the farmer "under the pretension that high protective duties would develop our infant industries and make everyone rich."¹²

⁹Watterson, Autobiography, II, 249.

¹⁰Krock, Editorials, p. 149.

¹¹David Ames Wells, "Evils of the Tariff System," North American Review, CXXXIX (September, 1884), 274-282.

¹²Watterson, Compromises, p. 414.

Watterson also blamed protection for destroying foreign markets and precipitating the Panic of 1873.¹³ Unequivocally he proclaimed, "Government has no constitutional right nor power in equity to levy a dollar of taxation except for its own support, and that, when the sum required had been obtained, the tax shall stop" ¹⁴ He even distrusted reciprocity, stating, "I see the Republican party . . . loaded with Reciprocity capsules; each capsule nicely sugared to suit the fancy of such infants [industries] as accept the treatment, each pillbox bearing the old reliable Protectionist label!" ¹⁵ Such political tactics never moved the Courier-Journal editor off his hard stance on the tariff question.

Watterson brought his tariff doctrine to the national political scene in the Liberal Republican movement of 1872 which, he believed, "was, in its conception, a Free Trade movement." ¹⁶ Primary aims

¹³ Wall, Reconstructed Rebel, p. 120.

¹⁴ Watterson, Compromises, p. 415.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Krock, Editorials, p. 149.

of the Mugwump party were to block the re-election of President Ulysses S. Grant, to introduce new ideas on civil service reform, to pacify the South, to bring order and economy to government finances, and to purify political life. Reductions in the protective tariff were mentioned as a way to end current corruption in the government.¹⁷ The editor also saw the gathering of Republicans and Democrats as a meeting on "common ground at last, to wrest the government of their affairs from the clutch of rings and robbers" ¹⁸ In the year preceding the St. Louis convention Watterson continually preached the arguments of Wells in his paper's columns. He attacked the repeal of internal revenue taxes, which benefitted only the manufacturer, but not the consumer, especially since the tariff remained high.¹⁹ Yet, in order not to compromise his own influence within the Democratic Party, Watterson proceeded with caution in

¹⁷Josephson, The Politicos, p. 159.

¹⁸New York Times, June 28, 1876, p. 4.

¹⁹Louisville Courier-Journal, July 8, 1871; August 1, 1871.

his endorsement of reunion and reform, the bywords of the Liberal Republicans.

The nomination of Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, and a staunch protectionist, by the conventioners in St. Louis brought a quick end to any hopes of a strong, low tariff plank in the party's platform. Free traders deadlocked the convention, postponing compromise until the last day. Finally the suggestion of the New York protectionists was accepted: "Endorse neither reform nor protection, but let the people in each congressional district decide the question."²⁰ Watterson diplomatically accepted the choice of Greeley, observing, ". . . we say nothing of his tariff doctrines, which are in a manner subordinate to more urgent and fundamental ideas of our existence as a nation" ²¹ He justified the support of the quaint eastern editor as beneficial for three reasons. First, Watterson believed that no

²⁰ Matthew T Downey, "Horace Greeley and the Politicians: The Liberal Republican Convention in 1872," Journal of American History, LIII (March, 1967), 734-740.

²¹ Louisville Courier-Journal, March 13, 1872.

Democratic candidate could win. Secondly, he felt that the Democratic Party could subvert and take over the movement as it had done in Missouri. And finally, Watterson surmised that the Liberal movement, win or lose, would split the Republican Party.²² Later he blamed defeat on "a party not one with itself; incoherences and inconsistencies . . . the High Priest of Protection [Greeley] on a free trade platform; everybody on a fence of his own, and nowhere any deep conviction."²³ Although he toned down his tariff reform calls through 1872, Watterson continued snipping away at the Treasury surplus, a high tariff byproduct, and an inactive Congress.²⁴

The Panic of 1873 made Democrats more receptive to tariff reduction proposals. Watterson, whose full force in the tariff battle would not be effectively felt until the 1880's, received practical committee experience as the chairman of the 1876 convention. The St. Louis convention's platform of that year

²²Krock, Editorials, pp. 35-36.

²³New York Times, July 1, 1881, p. 2.

²⁴Louisville Courier-Journal, May 9, 1872.

condemned high tariffs while remaining evasive. Four years later, the Louisville editor, as chairman of the Resolutions Committee, wrote his "Tariff for Revenue Only" message into the platform, but it was subsequently repudiated by Winfield Scott Hancock, the Democratic presidential candidate. "When the Republicans accused their opponents of favoring a downward revision of the tariff . . . Hancock hastened to reply that under his party" the industrial interests of the nation would have as much protection as would be given them under the Republican banner.²⁵ This setback in the tariff battle was only a prelude to the battles Watterson would wage in the coming years. "As much as any man in the nation, it would be he who would make the tariff for the next decade and a half the vital issue that it was in American politics."²⁶

Regardless of the various propositions Watterson made, the pivot around which they turned was "to be found in that simple sentence, 'A tariff for revenue

²⁵ Josephson, The Politicos, p. 289.

²⁶ Wall, Reconstructed Rebel, p. 185.

only.' "²⁷ Through the 1880's and 1890's Watterson championed the candidacy of John Carlisle of Kentucky every four years as the savior of the Democratic Party and the embodiment of tariff reform. The brilliant Carlisle, secretary of the Treasury under Cleveland, could never match the popular appeal of the president. The chief executive espoused Watterson's cause but was immensely disliked by the journalist. In Cleveland, Watterson found an individual whose will was as strong as his own, and who did not take kindly to the rather pretentious ways Watterson exhibited in his relations with presidents. A clash of personalities in this instance probably contributed heavily to Cleveland's and Watterson's inability to cooperate in achieving meaningful tariff reform.²⁸

On April 29, 1884, Watterson issued his call for

²⁷ New York Times, March 16, 1882, p. 5.

²⁸ Marcossou, Marse Henry, p. 137. Arthur Krock, one of Watterson's editorial proteges, added a side-light to the Watterson-Cleveland break in his memoirs. According to Krock, rumors had it that the journalist had been a little too Southernly "in manifesting his admiration for the president's wife. See Krock, Memoirs, 60 Years on the Firing Line (New York, 1968), p. 39.

tariff reform under two of his most famous slogans. Deeming the call the "Star-Eyed Goddess of Reform," the editor again trumpeted for a "Tariff for Revenue Only." Watterson almost excluded himself from the Democratic convention because of his strident editorial tone. Fearful that Watterson's stance would destroy any chance the party had to elect a president, Kentucky Democrats refused to choose the crusader in the Louisville primary. Only by appointment as a delegate-at-large was Watterson able to take his seat at the national convention.²⁹

As a member of the Platform Committee at the Chicago gathering, Watterson pushed through a plank that concluded: "Federal taxation shall be exclusively for public purposes and shall not exceed the needs of the Government economically administered."³⁰ Other committee members were not wholeheartedly behind the plank, and Watterson unhappily accepted a proposal calling for moderate revision of the tariff instead.

²⁹ New York Times, April 27, 1884, p. 1.

³⁰ Wall, Reconstructed Rebel, p. 187.

In later years he labeled the Chicago resolution "a straddle."³¹

Between 1884 and 1888 the pressure for tariff reform continued to mount throughout the nation, a pressure Watterson continued to help sustain. Cleveland responded to the situation with his frank tariff message in December, 1887, which called for unequivocal tariff reductions. "Our present tariff laws, the vicious, inequitable and illogical source of unnecessary taxation, ought to be at once revised and amended,"³² the president argued. Watterson fully approved of Cleveland's staunch stand. He believed, however, that the resulting bill introduced by Roger Mills, of Texas, and William Morrison, of Illinois, aimed at lowering the duties, was inadequate, protectionist in content, and free trade in guise only.³³

Watterson regarded the mid-term elections in 1886 as a challenge to the administration for more

³¹ Marcossou, Marse Henry, pp. 139-140.

³² Josephson, The Politicos, p. 398.

³³ New York Times, September 15, 1888, p. 2.

vigorous tariff reform. During the next two years the editor stumped the East Coast for tariff reform.³⁴

At that time he wrote that the Democratic Party had two enemies, "the Republican party . . . and the tariff party, an army of mercenaries and monopolists with a treasury filled by millions of dollars wrung remorselessly . . ."³⁵ from the populace. A popular term for the high tariff and the fund surplus at the time was "Treasury Octopus."

In discussing the issues of 1888 in various magazines, Watterson predicted that the Democrats would not be divided over the tariff as they had been four years earlier. "The case stands otherwise," he asserted. "The fruits of unjust taxation are at length visible to the naked eye in a vast surplus . . . lying idle in the Treasury."³⁶

Although there were many ways to remove the surplus through extravagant government spending, Watterson

³⁴ Ibid., September 24, 1888, p. 5.

³⁵ Marcossou, Marse Henry, p. 148.

³⁶ Henry Watterson, "The Democratic Party Outlook," North American Review, CXLV (September, 1887), 270.

advocated tariff reduction as the best means of guarding against its recurrence. The presence of reformers in the East and West, where there were few in 1883, insured that the "Democratic party, led by the Democratic administration, would be substantially united in favor of lower import duties,"³⁷ Watterson thought. The message the editor reiterated in the article was the basic philosophy behind his adamant tariff position.

The issue between the parties will in this way be simplified, and will become a fight for the cheapening of the necessaries of life through a reduction of excessive imports on everything that enters into the daily consumption of the people . . . The surplus serves as a very lantern to expose the inequalities and false pretensions of an economic system that not content with robbing millions to enrich a few, has piled up a useless fund in the Treasury, to be stolen or wasted.³⁸

Watterson continued his crusade into the early months of 1888. Writing in Harper's, he refuted various protectionists' arguments, pointing to the ironic fact that the farmer, who had no protection, sold in a free, domestic market but had to buy in a

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 271.

protected one. He espoused the theory of historian Frederick Jackson Turner, who claimed that free land rather than protection spurred higher wages. Free land, Turner believed, drained off a potential surplus labor supply thereby keeping the labor market tight. Workers also had to pay higher prices for needed products than did their European counterparts, and this fact negated much of the higher salary. Watterson tied these economic facts to the existence of radicalism in the country, blaming labor unrest on the high tariffs.³⁹

The Democratic convention of 1888 witnessed a dramatic clash between Watterson as platform committee chairman and the Cleveland forces, revealing what would be the editor's greatest display of political power. Since the last days of 1887, Cleveland, faced with a possible split in the ranks of his party, sat quietly on his hard sounding tariff reform message. He sent his former campaign manager, Senator Arthur Gorman of Maryland, to the convention with a tariff plank that merely reaffirmed the Democratic

³⁹Wall, Reconstructed Rebel, p. 196.

platform of 1884; "only a determined stand by low-tariff delegates, headed by Henry Watterson of Kentucky, led the convention to endorse the president's own message [of 1887] in the platform."⁴⁰

That the tariff was the foremost issue in the editor's mind as 1892 approached was verified by another long article he had published the preceding year. Watterson pleaded for an election that would be a battle of issues and not factions, as occurred in 1887, when defeat brought the subsequent adoption of the McKinley Tariff. That legislation gave Watterson another weapon in his crusade against protectionism.⁴¹ Effective as of June 10, 1890, the bill raised the general level of rates higher than ever before. Passed by a Republican Congress, the tariff embodied the ingenious thinking of the exponents of protection. A shocked Cleveland called the act "an unjust tariff which banishes from many humble homes the comforts of life, in order that in the palaces of wealth luxury

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John Arthur Garraty, The New Commonwealth (New York, 1968), p. 294.

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Henry Watterson, "Straws," North American Review, CLIII (October, 1891), 487-488.

may more abound."⁴² The outcry against the legislation received ample attention from the Louisville editor.

Watterson termed the 1892 campaign issue a struggle between a revenue tariff and a protective tariff, "between those who maintain that the government has no constitutional right of taxation except to raise moneys needed for its own support, and those who maintain that taxation . . ." should favor certain classes and interests.⁴³

Fearing that any agreement on the tariff issue would be aborted by free silver agitation, Watterson attempted to discount the importance of the money controversy. "I do not believe that either side to this controversy is likely to get just what it expects," he commented. "If the skies should rain silver . . . it would, under our unequal tariff system, find its way back to the present custodians of

⁴² Harold Faulkner, Politics, Reform and Expansion, 1890-1900 (New York, 1959), pp. 106-107.

⁴³ Watterson, "Straws," p. 488.

the wealth of the country, leaving the tax-ridden farmer as poor as ever."⁴⁴

The 1892 convention again brought Watterson into open conflict with Cleveland's wishes. A delegate-at-large to the assembly and a member of the Resolutions Committee, he urged drastic tariff reductions, but the committee adopted the Whitney-Vilas plank, endorsing a stand similar to that taken in 1884.

Watterson, backed by Congressman Tom Johnson of Ohio, took his fight to the convention floor and again defeated Cleveland, "substituting a plank which, among other things, called high tariffs 'unconsti-

tutional.'"⁴⁵ The resolution denounced the McKinley Tariff as "the culminating atrocity of class legislation," and promised the masses free raw materials and cheaper manufactured goods.⁴⁶

Commenting on the incident, Watterson later said, "In 1892 the Democrats in National Convention took the trouble to throw out a semi-protectionist tariff

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 489.

⁴⁵ Marcossou, Marse Henry, pp. 155-156.

⁴⁶ Josephson, The Politicos, p. 498.

plank reported by the Platform Committee and to adopt one of their own, specific in its terms and requirements."⁴⁷ As to the effect of the clash on Cleveland, Watterson continued, "Mr. Cleveland first threatened to nullify this in his letter of acceptance. Dissuaded from doing so by assurance of what would happen to him in case he did, he weakly gave a kind of grunt as his assent."⁴⁸

Watterson's tariff crusade climaxed in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Like other southerners, Watterson distrusted any federal expenditure that would make high tariffs necessary,⁴⁹ even refusing to support the Blair Education Bill. Sponsored by Senator Henry W. Blair of New Hampshire in 1883, the bill provided for appropriations to southern states in proportion to the amount of illiteracy in each. "A Republican measure, the bill was designed to relieve that party of the embarrassment of a large surplus in the treasury which was due mainly

⁴⁷ Krock, Editorials, p. 97.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Pessen, Jacksonian America, p. 126.

to the high protective tariff."⁵⁰ Generally a progressive editor, Watterson put tariff reduction above all other considerations and saw the proposal to be merely a political scheme to retain a high protective tariff by draining the surplus from the Treasury. His stand diametrically opposed the view most southern industrialists held during the early debates over the measure.⁵¹

Tenaciously the editor clung to his reduction theories until his death, seeing the tariff as the prominent issue well into the next century. In the national conventions he developed skill in bargaining and blustering in order to insure that some mention of tariff reduction would appear in the platform. His basic reasoning remained the same, editorially and verbally. In his later years he would reflect:

The country has to be educated all over again . . .
 We have had ten additional years of more or less prosperous rapacity under a thieving tariff.
 What more can a true believer in a sound economic system expect--seeing the evil wrought by

⁵⁰Woodward, The New South, pp. 63-64.

⁵¹Allen Johnston Going, "The South and the Blair Education Bill," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIV (September, 1957), 286-287.

false professions--than the party lay down the simple, the axiomatic proposition that the Government has no right, constitutionally or equitably, to levy a dollar of taxation except for its own support, that every dollar in excess of this is robbery under the forms of law, and that, if we get the power, we shall proceed to revise the tariff so as ultimately, not precipitately, to reduce it to a revenue basis?⁵²

That Watterson was obsessed with tariff reform there can be no doubt. "I had become the embodiment of my own epigram, 'a tariff for revenue only,' "⁵³ the editor remarked. He fought legislation pertaining to education and veterans benefits⁵⁴ whenever he conceived such measures to be guises for retaining the protective tax. On no other stand did Watterson stray so far away from the accepted Redeemer position than on the tariff question. To understand this estrangement it must be remembered that Watterson's background was not Whiggishly-oriented, as were the past connections of so many of the Redeemers, but was instead developed on a laissez-faire economy that disavowed government spending and government profit.

⁵² Marcossou, Marse Henry, p. 176.

⁵³ Watterson, Autobiography, II, 133-134.

⁵⁴ Going, "Education Bill," p. 286.

In this instance, his conservative tendencies, native to the Tennessee of the Jacksonian era, would not brook any tariff that violated the Watterson code.

CHAPTER III

SILVER, THE SECONDARY ISSUE

Watterson's stand on the monetary issues of the day was more in line with the Redeemer element, a notable exception being Colonel Colyar of Tennessee, a Greenbacker and repudiationist.¹ Except when faced with the reality of financial disaster which engulfed the paper after the election of 1896, the editor remained steadfast in his opposition to cheap money. The sound dollar demanded sound monetary backing, regardless of the standard it was based upon, the editor reasoned. "All of us in the West and South are bimetallists; all of us are friends of the double and enemies of the single standard,"² Watterson exclaimed.

Because the tariff occupied so much of his ardor, not until the late 1880's and early 1890's did

¹Clyde Ball, "The Public Career of Colonel A. S. Colyar, 1870-1877," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, XII (March, 1953), 120.

²New York Times, February 16, 1891, p. 1.

Watterson's monetary precepts became more widely known. Watterson's opposition to Greenbackism and the unlimited coinage of silver traced its roots to the dominant classical school of his father's time. Such laissez-faire economists argued that "deflation would not inhibit economic growth, reasoning that interest rates . . . depended upon the amount of capital available as security for loans, not upon the currency supply."³

The editor's espousal of the cause of sound money began as early as 1872. Looking to the Northeast for capital for southern industrial development, Watterson supported Charles Francis Adams, Jr., the liberal aristocratic journalist from Massachusetts, at the Liberal Republican convention that year. He opposed a coalition with the West because of their support for Greenbackism.⁴ His opposition to Greenbackers stood out in his editorials in the early months of 1872. Especially caustic were his attacks on

³ Garraty, The New Commonwealth, p. 248.

⁴ Wall, Reconstructed Rebel, p. 101.

the Supreme Court for its decision declaring green-
backs to be legal tender.⁵

For twenty years, between 1876 and 1896, Watterson fought all forms of fiat money against the united sentiment of the West and South. In 1896 he lost his position as the top southern editor when he refused to support free silver and joined the Gold Democrats.⁶ Early in 1876 Watterson began to rally the public behind Samuel J. Tilden, his political Hercules and a sound money advocate. He attacked the proposals for inflating the currency, referring to inflation as a "Rag Baby," and commenting that "it could not put one additional greenback dollar into any man's pocket." Watterson saw inflation as a device that could destroy those whom it pretended to save. "The South, which took no stock in it, should loathe its memory. We tried it in the Confederacy under the idea

⁵ Louisville Courier-Journal, January 31, 1872.

⁶ Krock, Editorials, pp. 81-82; see also, Orlando Oscar Stealey, "The Claims of the Candidates: Henry Watterson," North American Review, CLXXXVII (June, 1908), 841-842.

it would pay our debts. It paid nothing."⁷ Such an experience was well embedded in the editor's mind.

In order to avoid inflation, Watterson's perennial suggestion was governmental frugality, which if properly applied could allow taxes to be reduced, freeing more money for the oppressed. This was a common Redeemer suggestion; yet, retrenchment had its drawbacks. Practiced widely by the various Redeemer governments, retrenchment severely retarded education and social movements in the South. Financial cutbacks also effected the status of state employees resulting in several major and minor fund scandals in the post-war decades. Watterson recognized the dangers inherent in frugality. "For let us confess it," he wrote after the Kentucky treasurer absconded with funds after twenty years in office, "all of us are more or less to blame for this wretched business."⁸

Watterson was also a resumptionist, but, because of political considerations, he compromised his resumption demand in 1876. Editorially he equivocated,

⁷ Krock, Editorials, p. 47.

⁸ Woodward, The New South, p. 73.

"That which is wanted is a financial policy at once honest and stable, giving a guarantee of ultimate resumption."⁹ Viewing the frantic party situation in Indiana and Ohio because of squabbles over resumption, Watterson wanted to avoid the issue. By urging a cutback in government spending, he felt the tight money situation would be alleviated and the various inflationist groups pacified.¹⁰ His anxiety to keep the money issue from splitting the party was evident again in 1880 when the editor admitted it would be difficult to "construct letters [platform planks] that will suit both the hard-money men of the East and the soft-money men of the West."¹¹

Watterson's major biographer, Joseph F. Wall, attributed the editor's lack of enthusiasm over the money question to his immense preoccupation with tariff reform and his insistence on clinging to the past and not acknowledging change. Although such reasoning is substantially correct, it does not fully

⁹ Krock, Editorials, p. 51.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ New York Times, July 28, 1880, p. 1.

explain Watterson's reluctance to join in the money battle until after 1895. Credit must be paid to his political acumen and compromising ways. Wishing to avoid any split in the Democratic Party which might dull its already dismal office record, and at the same time keep attention focused on tariff reform, Watterson continuously attempted to remove the sound money issue from the political spectrum. As to the charge that the journalist clung to the past and refused to acknowledge change, Watterson's progressive record in the area of union reconciliation and Negro civil rights refutes this accusation to some extent. His retention of the sound money precepts instilled in him in the pre-Civil War era did not necessarily relegate him to the ranks of the implacable.

His reluctant support of Cleveland during the latter's second term stemmed from his fear of Bryan and free silver advocates who were "seeking dominance of the monetary policy of the Democratic party . . ." ¹² Watterson's strategy, aimed at cooling the money issue, prominently appeared in an 1891 article in

¹² Krock, Memoirs, pp. 39-40.

which he declared,

There is always from certain quarters a clamor for 'more money,' and at the present moment this takes the form of a demand for 'more silver.' The terms 'free coinage' and 'unlimited coinage' are trolled from stump to stump with a volubility only too significant of the absence of information . . . The question of coinage is a very complicated question. It is not national but international. There is not, and never has been, any fixed relation between gold and silver. Our own coinage act is an experiment. Any amendment to it must be experimental . . ."13

Watterson blamed the Force Bill, and not the growing appeal of Bryan, for causing a split in the Democratic ranks over the silver issue. Silver Republicans voted for the bill's defeat, and in turn, Southern Democrats supported the Free Coinage Act, the editor reasoned.¹⁴ In 1893 Watterson's tariff reform efforts, and those of other low tariff men, were aborted by the Wilson-Gorman Tariff. Purportedly a reduction measure, it retained in nearly all respects "the overwhelmingly protective character of the McKinley Tariff, and . . . provided a shock for all true tariff-reformers." According to Watterson,

¹³ Watterson, "Straws," p. 488.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 489.

the bill by its cowardly concessions "struck a blow at the cause of genuine tariff reform."¹⁵ The act was accompanied by a domestic depression that tended to strengthen the protectionists' stand. Many tariff reformers, discouraged and disheartened, turned to free silver as a possible cure for the country's ills.¹⁶

Such defections infuriated Watterson and made the silver fantasy even more repugnant to him. By 1895 he could foresee the coming split in the Democratic ranks over the controversy and addressed a bit of advice to "the little gang of cheap Democratic politicians who, for their own profit, were playing upon the ignorance of their mob-following by advocating the debasement of the currency"¹⁷ Bitterly, he wrote, "The [silver] tail may wag the dog in Persia and India and China and Mexico and Peru,

¹⁵ Josephson, The Politicos, p. 543; see also, Woodward, The New South, p. 272.

¹⁶ Wall, Reconstructed Rebel, p. 211.

¹⁷ Tattler [pseudo], "Notes From the Capital," Nation, CIII (October 12, 1916), 342.

but it never has done it in these United States and it never will."¹⁸

As Bryanism gripped the country, Watterson began to inveigh against the movement. "Bryanism represents the outcry, the excess, the exaggeration of the depression the country has suffered from. That depression is due to the protective idea, and to the agitation of such questions as the money standard."¹⁹ Watterson spent 1896 in Switzerland caring for the education of his two children and writing a biography of Abraham Lincoln; but, he fully concurred with the action of Walter Haldeman, publisher of the Courier-Journal, in pulling the paper out of the Democratic camp and heading for the Gold Party banner. He attacked the Democratic platform as being chimerical and subjugated to populism.²⁰ In a letter from Switzerland, Watterson warned Kentuckians that the party could no longer straddle the silver issue. "It must either stand by the national party platform of

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ New York Times, November 29, 1896, p. 5.

²⁰ Krock, Editorials, pp. 79-80.

1892 and support the honest dollar, or it must declare war on the principles adopted by the National Administration . . . and choose the cheap dollar."²¹

Watterson sent few dispatches from Europe to the paper during the subsequent campaign. The Gold Democrats, at first interested in having Watterson as their standard bearer, abandoned the idea, fearing that the editor's tariff stance would alienate Democratic protectionists and send them into Republican arms. They instead chose ex-Generals John Palmer and Simon Bolivar Buckner and proceeded by their entrance into the campaign to insure McKinley's election.²²

Two of Watterson's editorial dispatches during the race especially stood out. The first dispatch carried the phrase, "No Compromise With Dishonor," the slogan of the Gold Party. The second cable, extremely lengthy, served as an excellent summation of Watterson's overview of the silver issue. In examining the history of silver since 1876, the editor remarked that twenty years ago everyone had been for

²¹New York Times, June 13, 1895, p. 3.

²²Marcosson, Marse Henry, pp. 163-169.

silver. "Not to be a bimetallist was not to be a Christian . . . most bimetallists knew quite as little about bimetallism as many Christians know about Christianity."²³

Watterson credited the principle of monetary rationale to Thomas Jefferson. "Mr. Jefferson had laid down the doctrine that we must ascertain the market value of gold and silver and regulate the ratio thereto. It was not a matter for political science to worry about."²⁴ Watterson advocated maintenance of an even balance between the two metals. Silver should not be demonitized, but freely circulated, as good as gold, and legal tender for all debts; but, there was "fifty times more of it in circulation than had been coined by our mints during the Nineteenth century before the dread act of 1873."²⁵

In summing up his case against free silver, Watterson argued,

²³Krock, Editorials, pp. 80-81.

²⁴Ibid., p. 81; see also, New York Times, October 24, 1897, p. 2.

²⁵Krock, Editorials, p. 81.

To favor silver as long as there seemed to be a chance to arrest its downward progress was one thing. To favor its use as money along with gold, and supported by the Government, every silver dollar as good as a gold one, is one thing. To drop the governmental responsibility whilst retaining the Government's stamp--to detach silver from gold and turn it loose on its own hook, as it were--to force fifty cents' worth of silver for one hundred cents' worth of debt--is quite another thing.²⁶

Doubtlessly, Watterson had less interest in the silver issue than did Haldeman, who had vast financial interests. His sparse contributions to the paper during the campaign and his refusal to return to the States to lead the fight evidenced two interesting sidelights. First, Watterson had apparently become disillusioned with politics because of the downgrading of the tariff controversy. Also, as witnessed by his own words, Watterson considered the Gold Democrats' campaign merely a subterfuge to prevent the election of Bryan. This idea was reaffirmed by a message from Haldeman in August of 1896 in which the publisher declared that McKinley would take the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

presidential election.²⁷ This belief was expanded by the vacationing editor when he commented, "The triumph of either is bad enough; but, in the case of Mr. McKinley, we are promised at least immunity from tampering with the money and credit of the nation, whilst in the case of Mr. Bryan we embark our all in a leaky boat" ²⁸

Despite his dislike for the circumstances under which McKinley was elected, Watterson did not expect the union between Gold Democrats and Republicans to last, reasoning that "the differences ~~were~~ too doctrinal and radical. McKinley ~~was~~ an extreme protectionist. The sound-money Democrats ~~were~~ sincere revenue reformers."²⁹ He also admitted that the silver issue was not dead, commenting, " 'Bryanism' is a mere fleabite to what it will be four years from now, if the Republican Party is not wise enough to cast a

²⁷ James Andersen Barnes, "The Gold-Standard Democrats and the Party Conflict," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XVII (December, 1930), 441-442.

²⁸ Krock, Editorials, p. 85.

²⁹ New York Times, November 29, 1896, p. 5.

few anchors to the windward;"³⁰ but the ill-wind was not aimed only at the Republicans.

The Courier-Journal's disloyalty to the Democratic Party was costly, since in Kentucky the Silver Democrats "had it all their own way."³¹ Until 1896 the paper had prospered; "it had crossed the stormy seas of the Reconstruction era and had weathered the headlands of Greenbackism . . . and it seemed to be entering a snug harbor when it struck a snag in Free Silver."³² The effect of the silver issue on the paper was disastrous. Within a year it lost one half of its daily circulation and nearly the whole of its mammoth weekly circulation.³³

Part of the tactful approach used to regain readership was the acceptance of Bryan as the Democratic candidate in 1900. Financial expediency dictated Watterson's surrender to the readers.³⁴ In

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Watterson, "The Political Outlook," p. 568.

³² Krock, Editorials, p. 247.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Walter Davenport, "Louisville Dervish," Nation, CLXXXII (March 17, 1956), 223.

accepting Bryan, Watterson slyly admitted the paper's mistake in revolting in 1896, but, instead of acknowledging free silver to be the doctrine of the day, the editor preferred to suggest that it was a dead issue. "There need be no more fear of a Mexicanization of the currency than there is of the reestablishment of African slavery. He who thinks so . . . [is] a credulous listener to partisan harangues."³⁵ Watterson saw free silver as the "vanishing lines of 1896,"³⁶ and even declared, "I am seriously thinking of discounting Mr. Bryan's peculiar views with respect to silver and . . . proclaiming him the greatest of living Americans."³⁷

The "fifty cent dollar" had had its day the editor proclaimed, and promptly turned to expansion and trustism, the topics he considered the issues of 1900. He felt McKinley had lost any chance to keep the sound money Democrats in the Republican camp because

³⁵ Krock, Editorials, p. 88.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ New York Times, August 18, 1899, p. 5.

of that party's failure to provide any tariff relief.³⁸ This failure provided another salve to the wounds of 1896 and facilitated Watterson's acceptance of Bryan in 1900. As for the free silver plank in the Democratic platform that year, Watterson remarked with some disdain, "It was carried in Committee by a single vote and that cast by a plump little nigger from Honolulu."³⁹

Sound money never received the energy from Watterson's pen that tariff reform commandeered. Perhaps the fact that he did not distrust silver, only silverites, accounted for his reluctance to brave the storm until 1896. His low-keyed approach to the issue did not suffice in that year, but experience showed him how not to change his tone but instead camouflage it in subsequent years. Despite the fact that his thinking on the money issue aligned itself with the best Redeemer policy, Watterson was not motivated by the Whiggish tendencies that guided his counterparts. His laissez-faire notions concerning the economy

³⁸ Watterson, "The Political Outlook," p. 571.

³⁹ Krock, Editorials, p. 97.

demanded a sound circulating medium, devoid of any inflationary tendencies. The integrity of the federal government rested upon a solid currency, the editor reasoned, and the strength of the union could only be maintained if the nation's economy remained healthy.⁴⁰

This form of reasoning was conducted under the influence of Watterson's conservative Jacksonian background, as was most of his political policy formulation.

⁴⁰Watterson, "The Political Outlook," p. 571.

CHAPTER IV

A LOVE OF LOUISVILLE

The major focus of the New South editors in the post-war period was on industry and appeals to the North for capital to cement reconciliation with common monetary bonds. The successful southern journalist usually appeared to be the very flower of the modern business world. A typical appeal from Watterson stated,

We are one people, and that solid fact, gives a guarantee of peace and order at the South, and offers a sure and lasting escort to all the capital which may come to us for investment . . . We need the money. You the North can make a profit off the development.²

According to historian Paul H. Buck, "No concept was more often transmitted to the North in the eighties than that the South had buried its resentments and had entered a new era of good feeling

¹Gerald White Johnson, "Journalism Below the Potomac," American Mercury, IX (September, 1926), 77-82.

²Watterson, Compromises, pp. 289-293.

based upon an integration of material interests."³ Watterson, realizing the need for northern participation in the South's industrial expansion, made the necessity a theme of numerous speeches and editorials. To disarm southern reactionaries who feared northern interference of any sort, he commonly made his appeal to the reliable, conservative interests in the North.⁴ Yet, Watterson's affinity for northern capital and comradeship stemmed from different sources than the partiality exhibited by his journalistic counterparts in the South. To a large extent, the Louisville editor's cosmopolitan attitude toward the North was conditioned by pre-war experiences.

Examining the background of the noted New South spokesmen, one discovers that Grady of the Atlanta Constitution was born in 1850; Daniel Augustus Tompkins of the Charlotte Observer in 1851; Walter Hines Page of the Raleigh State-Chronicle in 1855; and Richard Hathaway Edmonds, founder of the Manufacturers

³ Paul Herman Buck, The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900 (Boston, 1937), pp. 186-187.

⁴ Paul M. Gaston, The New South Creed, A Study in Southern Mythmaking (New York, 1970), p. 95.

Record, in 1857. Maturing during the post-war years, these editors suffered from the despair and desolation emitted by defeat and Reconstruction. They held no love for the old order and quickly adopted the industrial creed as a means of lifting the South and themselves from the bottom of the nation's economic ladder. Watterson, on the other hand, was born in 1840, and by the time the war broke out he had developed his philosophies toward industrialization as it related to the South.⁵ Unlike his contemporaries, Watterson had benefitted from pre-war experience in politics and journalism. Among his Washington acquaintances he could include John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, Abraham Lincoln, and Stephen Douglas. Besides being exposed to a multitude of famous people because of his father's industrial and political interests, Watterson spent the late 1850's working for Washington and New York newspapers.

Immediately after the war's cessation, Watterson traveled north, seeking aid from his uncle

⁵ Ibid., pp. 48-54.

Stanley Matthews of Cincinnati, an eminent Republican lawyer and jurist. His first post-war editorship was on the Cincinnati Times. Even after returning south, Watterson remained engulfed in the spirit of unionism. He inherited his post on the Courier-Journal from George Prentice, a Connecticut Yankee and the most influential pre-war Whig in the South. Prentice was credited with having prevented secession of Kentucky through the influence of his pen.⁶ The fact that Watterson's environment was, and continued to be, more than just southern in content, probably accounted for the ease with which he moved in northern circles during his lifetime.

The "Colonel" was undoubtedly influenced by the enthusiasm that gripped the southern hierarchy after 1870, but his was not a newly acquired exuberance. To Redeemer editors, the term New South "in their lexicon bespoke harmonious reconciliation of sectional differences, racial peace, and a new economic and social order based on industry and scientific,

⁶ Virginius Dabney, Liberalism in the South (Chapel Hill, 1932), p. 136.

diversified agriculture" ⁷ Such definitions were openly embraced editorially by Watterson, who openly admitted that "the South, having had its bellyful of blood, has gotten a taste of money, and it is too busy trying to make more money to quarrel with anybody." ⁸

An immensely popular and well-traveled individual, Watterson developed close friendships with most of the day's big financiers. New York, the hub of financial wheeling-dealing, was almost like a second home to the editor, but Watterson was a journalist, not a capitalist. His advocacy of industrialization in the South brought him no apparent wealth. It was instead tied to a belief that the nation's wounds could be healed only by connecting the North and South with economic links. ⁹ Although Watterson's numerous speeches throughout his career, especially in the New England area, advocated

⁷ Gaston, New South Creed, p. 7.

⁸ Stanley Phillip Hirshson, Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro (Gloucester, 1968), p. 151.

⁹ Watterson, Compromises, p. 318.

financial cooperation, his own actions in the area of industrialization seem limited to words only.

Like many members of the New Order, Watterson was a supporter of railroad expansion, but his promotional efforts were devoted primarily to one railroad with an eye toward how it could benefit his adopted city, Louisville. Railway enthusiasm was part of Watterson's heritage. "My Grandfather Watterson," he once wrote, "was a man of mark in his day. He was decidedly constructive--the projector and in part the builder of an important railway line--an early friend and comrade of General Jackson."¹⁰ Until the panic of 1857, when much of his wealth was wiped out, Harvey Watterson also played the part of a quasi-entrepreneur, but his investments were of a piecemeal nature.

In scanning available material no evidence has been revealed to show that Watterson ever profited from his promotion of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. What is evident though was his devotion to Louisville. Watterson continuously praised the

¹⁰ Watterson, Autobiography, I, 20.

Falls City and advocated any cause that held the promise of future prosperity for the city.¹¹ "This is a good time for Louisville to retire from politics and go into railroading,"¹² he once exhorted. And indeed, Louisville was already deeply immersed in the railroad scene. It was the gateway to the South, "but a gate painted in the somber tones of New England and hung on hinges of Yankee practicality."¹³ But, the Falls City was not the only location assuming a different coat of paint, for as Watterson observed, "If proselytism be the supreme joy of mankind, New England must be pre-eminently happy, for the ambitions of the South are to out-Yankee the Yankee."¹⁴

The L & N, completed before the outbreak of the Civil War, connected the two cities. Promoted and controlled by Louisville businessmen, it "had been built in the expectation that its profits would mostly be derived from the carrying of Southern

¹¹Louisville Courier-Journal, July 7, 1871.

¹²Ibid., October 28, 1871.

¹³Wall, Reconstructed Rebel, p. 74.

¹⁴Woodward, The New South, p. 151.

freight to Louisville."¹⁵ As the L & N's northern terminus, Louisville was the major center for commerce between the central Ohio Valley and the interior South.¹⁶ It was this dominance that Watterson strove to maintain. Watterson praised the L & N for "making a 'United Germany' of the Southern railways which were lying loose . . . instead of leading to Louisville as they should."¹⁷ Louisville attempted to expand its own trade market and prevent any expansion of the commercial relations of its nearest rival, Cincinnati.¹⁸ Watterson's primary efforts in this area consisted of direct and indirect pressure. Until 1872 such actions successfully halted the expansion of any railway into Louisville territory that threatened the stranglehold held by the city.

Watterson's direct actions consisted of lobbying

¹⁵ Robert Spencer Cotterill, "The Louisville and Nashville Railroad, 1861-1865," American Historical Review, XXIX (July, 1924), 700.

¹⁶ Leonard P Curry, Rail Routes South, Louisville's Fight for the Southern Market, 1865-1872 (Lexington, 1969), p. 2.

¹⁷ Woodward, The New South, p. 7.

¹⁸ Curry, Rail Routes South, p. 2.

ventures in the various state capitals. Accompanied by Basil Duke, a former Confederate officer employed by the L & N, he fought unsuccessfully in Nashville against granting a franchise to the Cincinnati-Southern, the L & N's, and Louisville's, most potent competitor. He also fought against incorporation of the rival line in the Frankfort legislature.¹⁹ With Watterson as its foghorn, the Courier-Journal harangued against expansion by the C & S throughout the early 1870's.

The paper opposed the C & S for three main reasons, or so it stated: dubious constitutionality of the Ferguson Act, the chartering legislation; lack of a definite line for the proposed route; and the stipulation that financial contributors could not hold stock. In order to circumvent the push of Cincinnati into Louisville's domain, Watterson constantly proposed various schemes of consolidation available to the L & N with burgeoning lines out of

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 73.

Memphis, New Orleans, Mobile, Savannah, and various towns in eastern Kentucky.²⁰

After 1872, when the C & S and other railways began to make inroads into what was Louisville's exclusive market, Watterson's ardor for expansion cooled somewhat, but, even after the takeover of the L & N by a northern syndicate headed by Edward Green, Thomas Fortune Ryan, Jay Gould, and August Belmont, Watterson continued to support the railway's massive consolidation moves. Only after the passage of the majority of the L & N's stock into the hands of London financiers in 1884 did the editor abandon his propagandizing for the line.²¹ His only other contact with the railroad came in 1899, when, out of political necessity, Watterson backed William Goebel for the governorship of Kentucky. Goebel, somewhat of a political reformer who had great appeal for the state's farmers, was assassinated during the legislative battle for the governor's chair. The L & N opposed

²⁰ Ibid., p. 71; see also, Woodward, The New South, p. 7.

²¹ John F Stover, The Railroads of the South, 1865-1900 (Chapel Hill, 1955), pp. 219-227.

Goebel because of his threat to break the railroad's powerful hold on the Kentucky economy. Watterson, who had supported Goebel in order to regain favor with the Democrats in the state after his defection in 1896, charged the L & N with the candidate's murder.²² At the same time, the editor disavowed ever having owned any stock in the rail line.²³ Despite his harangues though, Watterson maintained close contact with the railroad's hierarchy through his membership in the Manhattan Club, a political association of the Democratic aristocracy.²⁴

The only other time Watterson's paper was linked to railroading in a questionable manner involved the election of 1876 and the Scott Plan, a scheme for the creation of a southern route to the Pacific. What Watterson's exact relations were in the intrigue to buy the presidency for Rutherford B. Hayes in exchange for various financial and industrial

²² George Ross Leighton, Five Cities, The Story of Their Youth and Old Age (New York, 1939), p. 81.

²³ New York Times, August 18, 1899, p. 5.

²⁴ Henry Watterson, History of the Manhattan Club (New York, 1915), p. 80.

concessions to the South is not clear. Undoubtedly the strongest Tilden editor, he attacked the Scott Plan as an attempt to buy off the South. With the election deadlocked, he hammered away at such subterfuges. Then suddenly in late January of 1876 his paper became a "voice of moderation."²⁵

On January 26, General Henry Van Ness Boynton, Washington representative of the Cincinnati Gazette, wrote the following message to William Henry Smith, an adviser to Hayes: "You could not guess . . . who was the first man to surrender without hesitation to Scott after the talk I wrote you about. You will hardly believe it but it was Watterson!"²⁶ Watterson, who was in the capital that year finishing out the House term of a Louisville congressman who had died, had ample opportunity to confer with the various railroad lobbyists who inundated Washington. Comer Vann Woodward, the chronicler of the 1876 election, never offered an explanation for Watterson's change in attitude. Another author suggested that

²⁵ Woodward, Reunion and Reaction, p. 121.

²⁶ Ibid.

Watterson dropped his presumed belligerence because of expected or actual benefits from the Texas and Pacific plan.²⁷

Since no evidence to substantiate this viewpoint has been disclosed, the interpretation suggested by Wall for Watterson's motives seems more realistic. The journalist was apparently interested in the benefits promised by the Scott Plan, as were most Redeemers, but it is doubtful that such intangibles swayed him. "A realistic acceptance of the situation" and his fear of possible anarchy led Watterson to submit.²⁸ Although much has been made of Watterson's call on the floor of Congress for 100,000 Democrats to march on the capital to insure Tilden's inauguration, the editor later claimed that his call was for a peaceful petitioning of Congress and not a violent demonstration. This explanation becomes palatable when it is remembered that the "Colonel" was one of the earliest advocates of pacification of the

²⁷ Harry Barnard, Rutherford B. Hayes and His America (Indianapolis, 1954), p. 349.

²⁸ Wall, Reconstructed Rebel, pp. 163-164.

union in the decade following the war. Rather than see the nation split asunder by the election dispute, the editor resigned himself to the reality that his candidate, who passively allowed subordinates to defend his cause, could not grab the presidency.

Although at times he was one of its most influential advocates, Watterson benefitted little from industrial progress in the South. He lived comfortably after middle-age but did not amass great wealth. The editor left an estate of \$228,500, mostly in government bonds, not an unusually large amount for a man who had headed the South's most prosperous paper for half a century.²⁹ His advocacy of rail progress rode the crest of Louisville's most expansive years and had that particular tone that Watterson reserved for issues dear to him.

Watterson was more of a journalist than a politician. Where exactly the influence of his heritage ended and the Redeemer philosophy began can not be determined, primarily because he came from an industrial-tinted background. Not saddled with a

²⁹ New York Times, April 12, 1922, p. 14.

fortune such as his father inherited (dissolved in the Panic of 1857), Watterson did not partake in any large financial speculation. The editor therefore did not suffer what he termed "the treats of Mammon, the perils that environ the excess of luxury and wealth" ³⁰ But, this did not keep him from freely associating with the money moguls of the day, men with whom he felt at home because of his background and not his hunger for redemption, the affliction carried by his journalistic contemporaries in the South.

³⁰Watterson, Compromises, p. 423.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

It can not be denied that Henry Watterson was a public figure of supreme importance¹ in the South in the final decades of the nineteenth century. But, to label him a Redeemer without acknowledging his heritage, as did Woodward, limits the interpretation of the range of personalities that went into partnership in promotion of the New South gospel. In the instances of monetary solidarity and industrial expansion, Watterson's preachments paralleled the flood of words published by other Redeemer journalists. But, in the area of tariff reform he was unyielding in his demands for a reduction or removal of the various protective duties, despite an opposite stand by his publishing contemporaries.

One other area should be discussed in order to develop completely the peculiar theory of this paper on

¹ Woodward, The New South, p. 145.

Watterson, that he was a Redeemer by coincidence. The editor's racial stance, while in the best paternalistic tradition of the New South thinking, was also influenced by his pre-war background. Although his grandfather had owned slaves, Henry was heavily influenced by his father, a staunch unionist who had opposed slavery.² Yet, Harvey was very anti-Negro, blaming the black for all the South's ills.³ Even though he battled for the black man after the war, Watterson retained his father's coldness toward the race. The Louisville editor was instrumental in having the Kentucky black laws removed from the statute books, and he helped to send some forty leaders of a bogus branch of the Ku Klux Klan to jail for their murders of inoffensive freedmen.⁴

The key to Watterson's racial position harkens back to the philosophy of Thomas Jefferson. In a

² Martin Abbott, editor, "The South as Seen by a Tennessee Unionist in 1865: Letters of H. M. Watterson," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, XVIII (June, 1959), 149.

³ Thomas Benjamin Alexander, Political Reconstruction in Tennessee (Nashville, 1950), p. 48.

⁴ Dabney, Liberalism, p. 228.

rather pessimistic tone, the editor once proclaimed in words reminiscent of the attitude of the sage of Monticello that

The Negro [could] never become in any beneficent or genuine sense an integral and recognized part of the body politic except through the forces of evolution, which are undoubtedly at work, but which in the nature of the case must go exceedingly slow.⁵

In the same address Watterson declared, "I grew up to regard the institution of African slavery as a monstrous evil . . . The war over, I fully realized that the negro . . . must be made a freeman in fact, as he was in name . . ." ⁶ Despite his actions aimed at securing for the Negro "a white man's chance," ⁷ Watterson never fully dispatched himself from the paternalistic emotion that gripped the southern hierarchy. Many times he would in effect state, "The well-being of the negro must originate at home . . . he should be left to work out his destiny--

⁵ Watterson, Compromises, p. 448; see also, Julian Parks Boyd, editor, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 17 volumes (Princeton, 1955), VIII, 186.

⁶ Ibid., p. 446.

⁷ Marcossou, Marse Henry, p. 219.

a hard one at best--in his own way."⁸ The editor felt that the Negro was the ward of the South and the white's well-being was interwoven with the black man's fate, "whose only hope of the future [lay] in educating and elevating them to as near an approach to equality as race differences [would] allow."⁹ Such a statement had as much Jeffersonian reasoning as it had Redeemer appeal.

Watterson's allegiance to his heritage accounted for his ardent nationalism and disapproval of government interference in the deliverance of the South. The New South was not so new to Watterson in the sense that he saw it in terms familiar to the 1840's and 1850's. "That we're a republican society indeed," the editor once exclaimed, "a society to be proud of because [the society] has gone back for its inspiration to the homely, homespun sources from whence we draw all that is strong and worthy in our life as a nation and

⁸ Watterson, "The Solid South," pp. 54-55.

⁹ Henry Watterson, "The Hysteria of Sectional Agitation," Forum, V (April, 1888), 145-146.

as a people."¹⁰ Despite his glorification of those "homespun sources," Watterson for the most part ignored the plight of the farmer, scarcely mentioning him in his editorials except to berate movements such as Greenbackism and populism.

Watterson could recall his opposition to secession prior to the war to refute any charge of hypocrisy that was leveled at many of the Redeemers.¹¹ He also recognized the difference between his philosophy and that of many of the New Order Democrats, stating that "the old Whig leaven is there in all the States; many Southerners love the memory of Henry Clay and the idea of Protection, internal improvements, [and] centralization."¹² That Watterson, for the most part, fought against all such ideas, spoke well for his conservative Jacksonian upbringing.

The "Colonel" was consistent in his demands for

¹⁰Henry Watterson, "European Society Contrasted With Ours," Cosmopolitan Magazine, XL (November, 1905), 12.

¹¹Gaston, New South Creed, pp. 92-93.

¹²Hirshson, "Farewell," p. 150.

reunification of the nation: "What we really need in the South is identity with all things national,"¹³ development of strong local governments, retention of a sound money system, and most of all, the diminishment of the tariff. Throughout his political career, however, he recognized the necessity of compromise. Despite his hot-tempered retorts, both in public and in print, Watterson chaired many bargaining sessions at national conventions, which he backed by the influence of his editorials.

"I have said that the Government under which we live is a compromise between conflicting interests . . . it must always rest upon the basis of compromise . . .,"¹⁴ the editor reasoned in an 1894 speech. Despite the strident tone his editorials took around convention time, Watterson could be rather cynical in upholding campaign pledges. He explained, ". . . we long ago ceased to set much store by party platforms. As the cynic observed of ghosts, we have

¹³Krock, Editorials, p. 41.

¹⁴Watterson, Compromises, p. 50.

seen too many of them to believe in them."¹⁵ The associate of almost all famous American figures until his death in December, 1921, Watterson developed friendships on both sides of the political path.¹⁶ His allegiance to the South was not only sectional but also instinctive, tempered by a recognition of the need for reconciliation between the nation's factions. Watterson's adherence to his basic political beliefs surpassed sectional sympathies alone, being soundly defended from New England to New Orleans by the "Colonel." The Louisville editor fitted into the New Order niche primarily because he had grown out of a crack in the facade of the Old South that had the attributes of Jacksonian unionism and industrialism. The crack became a chasm in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, broken open by the flood of Redeemers espousing much of the doctrine Watterson had inherited and nurtured.

¹⁵ Krock, Editorials, p. 97.

¹⁶ Tattler, "Notes From the Capital," p. 342.

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