

Kossuth is Robert Toombs

Clépvissely Georgia

It was the intention of Georgia's Constitutional Unionists, who comprised six out of eight of the state's congressional delegation, to initiate a nationwide party based on their principles. Impractical and visionary, the scheme never really got off the ground, if indeed such veteran politicians as Toombs and Stephens ever believed it could. As early as January 7, 1852, just a few weeks after Congress opened, Unionist Charles Murphy from Decatur wrote Governor Cobb: "As to what we ought to do I am at a great loss but one thing is certain that the old Parties are to remain and no 3rd Party will be formed." He thought Toombs and Stephens were acting as "partisans" and unwilling to sign either the Democratic or Whig Party with Unionist principles.²⁵

Early in February, the *National Union* trumpeted gleefully though a bit prematurely that the Constitutional Union Party was dead. "The Union bubble has burst, and the dead carcass [*sic*] of the Union party lies stinking above ground, with no one to give it a decent burial." Toombs and other Unionists were accused of knocking now on the Democratic door. "Let us watch," it said, "and see what Democrats are willing to open the door and let in these wolves in sheep's clothing."²⁶

On February 29 another of the Georgia Unionists, E. W. Chastain, informed Cobb that it appeared Stephens would fall back into the Whig ranks, while Toombs' position was something of an enigma. He said that Senator William C. Dawson, Berrien's colleague, was allied with Stephens and that the three doubtless understood each other. "I think I see breakers ahead but I shall still hope for the best," he concluded.²⁷

Meanwhile, Toombs was experiencing an unhappy time. Plagued by rheumatism, which finally drove him from his seat in Congress in March and back to Georgia in April, his participation in House affairs was at a minimum.²⁸ His one major speech during this period was given at a congressional banquet at Willard's Hotel in commemoration of Washington's birthday. Toombs took this occasion, along with other speakers present, to attack the Hungarian rebel chieftain Louis Kossuth, who was in the United States en-

²⁵Charles Murphy to Cobb, in Howell Cobb Papers, University of Georgia.

²⁶Milledgeville *Federal Union*, February 3, 1852.

²⁷E. W. Chastain to Cobb, in Howell Cobb Papers, University of Georgia.

²⁸Julia Toombs to Mrs. Marsha Calhoun Burt, May 29, 1852, in Armistead Burt Papers; Augusta *Chronicle*, March 6, 1852.

listing money and support for continuation of the struggle against Austrian domination. In strongly conservative and isolationist terms, he condemned the solicitations of the popular revolutionist, saying Kossuth wished the United States to "turn knight-errant, imitate the knight of La Mancha [Don Quixote], and travel up and down the world, revenging or righting the wrongs of all injured nations." The United States should not, he said, interfere with the institutions of another country, in view of the difficulty it was having agreeing on the proper principles of its own internal policy. Let it look after its own affairs and steer clear of European entanglements. Those nations who desired to be free had only to will it.²⁹ The *New York Daily Times*, ardent Kossuth champion, deplored the addresses, saying the "mantle of Washington was [being] made to protect the interests and the political crimes of despots of Europe."³⁰ The Kossuth rage continued for some time in the United States but finally evaporated when it appeared that the Hungarian wanted active intervention by the United States in Europe, something traditional American policy opposed.

The refusal of Toombs and other former Whigs to play ball with the national party also caused the *Times* much annoyance. "Those gentlemen put up the State of Georgia at public auction, and pocketed the price of its sale. They found it very convenient, for their personal purposes, to discard all allegiance to the national Whig party, and to enter the field as the champions of a new faith. They have prospered by it."³¹ Toombs was again attacked the next day. The *Times* spoke of how he had "bargained himself" into the Senate two years before any vacancy had occurred.³²

The political situation in Georgia in the spring of 1852 was characterized by party fragmentation and wholesale confusion, leading eventually to a staggering five electoral tickets in the presidential contest in November. In late 1851, shortly after the gubernatorial election, the Southern Rights party had assumed the Democratic label under the leadership of Herschel V. Johnson, and began to work toward the rehabilitation of the party in Georgia. On March 31, these "Regular" Democrats met in state convention,

²⁹*Augusta Chronicle*, March 18, 1852.

³⁰*New York Daily Times*, March 17, 1852, hereinafter cited as *New York Times*.

³¹*Ibid.*, April 14, 1852.

³²*Ibid.*, April 15, 1852.

