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THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN OF 1860 IN TENNESSEE[1]

By MARGUERITE BARTLETT HAMER

"The election of old Abe Lincoln, the shortest way to a Southern Confederacy," was a familiar toast in the cotton states on the eve of the fateful presidential election that preceded the Civil War.[2] In Tennessee, however, such a sentiment was by no means unanimously entertained. By two of the three parties that contested for Tennessee's presidential votes, it was frequently and vigorously repudiated. Within the third party, secession was threatened and even advocated, but the dominant sentiment of the state was voiced by those who held that "the mere election of any one man to the presidency of the American people in accordance with the Constitution" did "not of itself furnish any just excuse . . . for dissolving the Union." Certain leaders went further and declared that "the men of the land of Jackson" should not be "dragooned" into joining "eight little nigger cotton states" in their schemes to destroy the government, but should on the contrary bring "Southern fanaticism" to its senses by crushing the "serpent of disunion."

In Tennessee there was a strong tradition of loyalty to the Union rather than to Southern sectionalism. Furthermore, it was fully realized that war would follow a disruption of the Republic, and that, in such a war, Tennessee's geographical position would render her the natural battleground. She would become, it was believed, an unhappy buffer state, a sort of Belgium, Poland, or Ireland,

[1]In addition to the materials specifically cited in footnotes, this paper is based upon a study of the files of five Nashville newspapers, the *Republican Banner*, the *Patriot*, the *Gazette*, the *Union and American*, and the *News*, of one Memphis newspaper, the *Appeal*, and of numerous clippings in the T. A. R. Nelson scrap-books in the McClung Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville. Unless otherwise indicated, all dates are for the year 1860.

[2]*Republican Banner* (Nashville), Oct. 19.

while Southern "fire-eaters" who had provoked the war would be enjoying themselves in Europe, engaged in "proving the supremacy of Southern civilization," or "teaching Italians state rights democracy."[3]

Tennessee was a slave state. Slaves represented the investment of millions of dollars. Common field hands were selling, in 1859, for $1400 to $1500. A woman, aged forty-four, sold for $1120, a girl of fourteen for $1355, and a boy of nineteen for $1675.[4] Little wonder then that all political groups within the state pronounced slavery to be of "divine origin." A Democratic meeting in Lauderdale county resolved that through bondage the slave was "not only civilized but moralized," and that therefore it was a "right and duty to hold him in that condition which" would "render him most acceptable to the truths of the Christian religion."[5] In Knoxville, an Opposition party meeting declared: "The right to hold slaves is Divine and inalienable and as distinctly recognized by the Holy Scriptures as the marriage relation, therefore, constitutions made by men cannot destroy slavery, but slavery can destroy constitutions, for that which is divinely established will prevail over the work of men."[6]

Conservative leaders in Tennessee had long opposed the demands of Southern extremists in the developing controversy over slavery. In doing this they had maintained that loyalty to the Union and the Constitution was not incompatible with the preservation of the South's "peculiar institution." In the years immediately preceding 1860, however, certain developments caused a growing fear throughout the South that within the Union the institution of slavery was endangered. In Tennessee the growth of this fear was evident.

The rapidly increasing strength of the young Republican party was viewed with alarm by many. It was mistakenly identified with abolitionism. Its members were commonly referred to with horror as "Black Republicans." All political groups in Tennessee shuddered at the historic but misplaced fear of servile insurrections. Many believed, or professed to believe, that the election of a Republican president would be followed by insurrections in

[3] *Patriot*, Nov. 5.
[4] *Gazette*, Nov. 15, Dec. 11, 1859.
[5] *Appeal*, Apr. 6.
[6] *Republican Banner*, Jan. 21.

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The special dread of Republicanism was intensified in the late days of 1859 by definite manifestations of the "irrepressible conflict" between slavery and freedom. The ill-timed invasion of Virginia by the fanatical John Brown aroused the border states, Tennessee among them, to fever heat. These states regarded themselves as "breakwaters to protect the South from the overflow of this terrible crusade." In Jacksboro, Campbell county, in the mountain section of East Tennessee, a Democratic meeting pronounced the Harper's Ferry episode "an outrage upon Southern rights," demanded "*equality* in the Union or *independence* out of the Union," and declared that Tennessee was determined not to "compromise her honour, nor yet to submit to violent infractions of her reserved rights." Not only Democrats, but their political opponents denounced the Harper's Ferry escapade. In Knoxville, a meeting of the Opposition expressed abhorrence of "such filibustering forays as that of John Brown."[8] When at a dinner given by a medical college at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a professor remarked that John Brown ought not to be hanged, his Tennessee students expressed their disdain by seceding in a body and thereafter pursuing their studies in the medical department of the University of Nashville.[9]

A real grievance to slaveholders in a border state, and one that did much to arouse sectional feeling throughout the South, was the existence of the "Underground Railroad" from slavery to freedom and its support by Northern "fanatics" and even indirectly by Northern legislatures. The *Union and American*, the Democratic organ in Nashville, asserted that in violation of the Constitution the "Railroad" ran off "thousands and tens of thousands in value of persons or property as you please." It complained that "every coloured body servant attending a Kentuckian or a Virginian to Saratoga, Newport or Niagara is beset by a body of hounds who often actually force him to run away."

Northern abolitionists were a constant source of irritation to

[7]A. W. Howard to T. A. R. Nelson, Nov. 23, Nelson Mss. in McClung Collection; *Appeal*, Jan. 7.
[8]*Republican Banner*, Jan. 21.
[9]*Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, quoted in *Appeal*, Dec. 21, 1859; *Gazette*, Dec. 10, 1859.

the slaveholding South. The desire to avert abolitionism, which was confused in the popular imagination with Black Republicanism, was the aim of all political groups in Tennessee. Each sought in its own way and by its own candidate to save the country from Seward, the well known exponent of the irrepressible conflict theory, and from Lincoln, the unknown Black Republican.

The Democratic party, the party of the venerated Tennesseeans, Jackson and Polk, was the dominant party in the state and in the nation. It held its state convention in Nashville on January 18 and selected delegates to attend the national party convention which was scheduled to convene on April 23 at Charleston, South Carolina. At Nashville were drawn up a set of resolutions which deserve particular mention, for they were later embodied almost verbatim in the first tentative platform submitted at the national party convention where they gained fame as "the Tennessee Platform," the "ultimatum of the South." The failure of the Charleston convention to accept them led to the disruption of that ill-starred gathering, and to fatal schism within the Democratic ranks. These resolutions declared that the recent decision of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case legalized slavery in all the territories of the United States, and they asserted the doctrine of the pro-slavery extremists, that it was the duty of the Federal government to protect slavery as an institution in those territories. The convention concluded its work by announcing its advocacy of a favorite son, Andrew Johnson, for the presidential nomination.[10]

The candidacy of Andrew Johnson for his party's nomination was promoted in Tennessee by the Democratic press. The *Union and American* eulogized him as "a people's man," unafflicted "with the crude learning of the schools," a "favourite son of the toiling millions," a "lion of the tribe of Jackson," "not a pampered son of wealth," but "a real home-made man standing head and shoulders taller than those who have rubbed their backs against a college wall." The *Lebanon Democrat* wrote: "We believe that he comes nearer combining the executive ability of Jackson, the profound statesmanship of Calhoun, and the diplomatic sagacity of Talleyrand than any man that our country has produced." The Tennessee Democracy believed that Johnson could carry the lower classes, North and South. The campaign material used in

[10] *Union and American*, Jan. 20, 26; *Banner*, Jan. 19, 20; *Patriot*, Jan. 18, 20.

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his behalf was strikingly like that used in the support of Jackson in 1828 and 1832. He was "emphatically a man of the people"; and "the hard fisted yeomanry of the country" would rejoice in a president who hated "all aristocratic monopolies." Johnson, like Jackson before him, it was said, looked upon "labour as the hand maid of free government and sordid capital as the enemy of both." Though the champion of the common people, it was expected that Johnson would not be offensive to the aristocrats of the South. The *Somerville Democrat* pictured him as the hero of Southern rights, saying that though he lived in the mountain section amid "abolition fanaticism" which "threatened to spread its baneful influence over Tennessee," he had had the courage to place "his heel on the monster's neck" and crush it.[11]

In opposition to the Democratic party in Tennessee were the remnants of the old Whig party that had won a majority of the elections in the state from 1835 to 1852. Their party, as a national organization, however, had been destroyed; many of them had given support to the short-lived American, or Know Nothing, party; in desperation they had finally called themselves the Opposition party in Tennessee. They had failed to carry the state in an election since 1852, but they were still powerful in numbers, in newspaper support, and in leadership, and they ardently desired the creation of a national, conservative, Union party, to which they could give their support. They held to the Union at all hazards and denounced the sectional agitation which threatened in the South to foment secession, a consummation that they zealously hoped could be averted. Their cause was espoused in the state capital, Nashville, by the *Republican Banner*, the *Patriot*, and to some extent the *Gazette*, which, however, professed to be independent.

On January 5, 1860, the *Republican Banner* came from the press with the name of John Bell at the head of its editorial column, and proposed him as the presidential candidate "of the Conservative, Union-loving, Constitution supporting Opposition to modern Democracy." Six days later, the Opposition members of the legislature met in the Senate chamber to inaugurate a movement that, they hoped, would eventuate in the selection of a president who would "crush out sectionalism" and save the Union

[11] *Union and American*, Feb. 12, 17, Mar. 7, 17, 23, 28, Apr. 3, 8, 12, 15; *Republican Banner*, Oct. 20, 21; *Appeal*, Feb. 22.

from threatened secessionism. To the country they proposed John Bell of Tennessee as a candidate for presidential nomination by the national Union party that was not yet organized. To their fellow Tennesseeans they called for the sending of delegates to a state convention.[12]

In response to this call, local conventions, in which strong emphasis was placed upon professions of devotion to the Union, were held in all parts of the state. Such, for example, was a meeting that Oliver P. Temple, T. A. R. Nelson, the erratic Parson William G. Brownlow, and other old Whig leaders staged at Knoxville for all those who "opposed fanaticism at the North and disunion at the South." The speakers deprecated the disruption of the nation which would be threatened should Seward be elected. Secession, they predicted, would "expose the country to all the horrors of revolution and civil war." The dissolution of the Union was only folly which would not, after all, remove the South "one hair's breadth further from the North."[13] Similarly, in Stewart county, Gustavus A. Henry, the "Eagle Orator," depicted the dangers into which the country had been led by the madness of contending factions. Tennessee, he declared, could be saved from "untold horrors" only by "a union for the sake of the Union," and a Union party would be the happy mean between Southern sectionalism on the one hand and abolitionistic fanatics on the other. He urged Tennessee to stand opposed "to the wild waves of sectional antipathy" which "surged around her from both the Southward and Northward."[14]

The state convention of the Union party, for such was the name now commonly used, met at Nashville on Washington's birthday, a date deliberately selected to provoke national patriotism. Seventy of the eighty-two counties of the state were represented. As was anticipated, John Bell was officially, as he had been already informally, acclaimed the choice of Tennessee Unionists for presidential nomination by the national convention to which delegates were chosen.[15]

In the early months of 1860, Union men of Tennessee took part in other states in promoting a popular movement in support

[12] *Patriot*, Jan. 13.
[13] *Patriot*, Jan. 24; *Republican Banner*, Jan. 21.
[14] *Patriot*, Feb. 16.
[15] *Republican Banner*, Feb. 23.

of the effort to form a national Union party. A banquet in Louisville, Kentucky, was given in honor of Tennessee Unionists. Here once more the impracticability of secession was pointed out, when a Tennesseean from Memphis inquired: "If you divide the Union, how will you divide it? I would not like to part with Pennsylvania, the keystone state, it contains the hall of our independence, it was there American liberty was born . . . I cannot give up Massachusetts—even such a devil as she has grown (laughter and cheers) —Disunion would be a stain of infamy upon our brows." A Kentuckian gracefully proposed the toast: "To Tennessee, in this national crisis, she will cherish in her heart of hearts the noble sentiments of her patriot hero: 'The Union, it must and shall be preserved.'" A Tennesseean responded: "Kentucky's great statesman [Henry Clay] who knew no North, no South, nothing but his country, his whole country, the Constitution, the Union, and the law." Cincinnati entertained the Union party leaders of Tennessee and Kentucky. Here Speaker Newman of the Tennessee Senate offered the toast: "Who shall dare to calculate the value of the Union? What God hath joined together let no man put asunder." Philadelphia, too, testified to its "appreciation of the Union spirit which pervaded the good old state of Tennessee" by giving a public dinner to a Tennessee citizen, Bailie Peyton, lately returned from Chili, and his friends, Horace Maynard, and T. A. R. Nelson.[16]

Such was the situation when, late in April, the delegates of the Democratic party in Tennessee repaired according to schedule to Charleston where they met their colleagues from fourteen other slave states and eighteen free states. There, in the national Democratic convention, a bitter battle was fought over the issue of what should be the party's position on the question of slavery in the territories. Should the inhabitants of a territory decide the question of slavery for themselves, or should they be powerless while Congress protected the slave owner in the enjoyment of his slave property, however obnoxious the institution of slavery might be to the inhabitants of the territory? The ideal platform, according to callous party manipulators, would lend itself to both interpretations and so satisfy both factions of the party. Such a "janus-faced" platform, it was generally conceded, might satisfy

[16] *Patriot*, Jan. 20, 24, 27, Feb. 1; *Republican Banner*, Jan. 20; *Union and American*, Jan. 22.

an intellectual contortionist like Stephen A. Douglas, who could still maintain his old "squatter sovereignty" doctrine in the North and at the same time uphold in the South the recent Supreme Court decision which confessedly legalized slavery in all the territories. But extreme Southern leaders had grown weary of Douglas and his subtle arguments. If he was not for slavery then he must be against slavery, the fire-eaters reasoned. Even Seward, the out-and-out Black Republican, was preferable to Douglas, the tricky politician. Radical Southern leaders were ready for a frank facing of the issue. They refused to "place a double construction upon a platform," for a platform unexplained was "a great political swindle in one-half of the states of the union." Openly they denounced popular sovereignty as a "baneful heresy," and even jeered at Douglas' renewed efforts to placate them, as when a Tennesseean, and later a South Carolinian, were named as possible running mates for Douglas. They were determined to accept nothing short of positive protection to slavery in the territories.

It is not surprising, then, that the committee on resolutions and platform, representative of both factions, failed to agree. The resolutions of the majority of the committee, reported to the convention by H. W. Wall of Tennessee, were those which had been adopted the preceding January at the Tennessee state party convention. They provided briefly that the Federal government must protect slavery in the territories, but these were rejected, and, instead, the convention adopted resolutions that were acceptable to the Douglas wing of the party. Tennessee's delegates voted against this platform and for the ultra-Southern one, but they did not join the delegates from the Lower South in bolting the convention. The Tennessee delegation made unsuccessful efforts to induce the seceding delegates to return. John K. Howard of Tennessee offered resolutions which he hoped would re-unite North and South. At the same time he assured the convention that his delegation would not secede even if their resolutions were not adopted for they "stood here to rebuke fanaticism." Howard moved further that a two-thirds vote should be necessary for nomination in accordance with party practice since 1844. This was agreed to, and the balloting began. For thirty-six ballots Tennessee alone supported Andrew Johnson whose twelve votes contrasted with the one hundred and fifty-one and one-half that

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Douglas received. Douglas, however, was unable to secure the two hundred and two votes necessary for nomination. Thereupon, on the motion of Howard of Tennessee, the convention adjourned to reassemble on the second Monday in June at Baltimore. The presiding officer dismissed the delegates with the observation that the convention had "in its destiny the permanence of the Democratic Party [and] . . . the question whether these United States should continue to endure."[17]

Meanwhile the seceders, the self-styled anti-squatter-sovereign-Democrats, had gone to Hibernian Hall and not to regions of perpetual fire and brimstone as their Douglas friends had advised. They, too, failed to make a nomination, but prepared a platform. This declared it to be the duty of Congress to protect the rights of persons and property, meaning slaves, of course, in the territories. The bolters indulged themselves in such sentiments as "Liberty first, and union afterwards." They were grown weary of "paeans sung in favor of the Union." On the third day they adjourned to meet again at Richmond, Virginia, on June 11, in order to nominate a candidate for president.[18]

The hope of healing the schism in the Democratic ranks was slight. Douglas and his doctrine of popular rule remained wholly unacceptable to the radical Southern element. Slaveholders realized that they could not people a territory as rapidly as could their Northern competitors, who were aided by societies which could "send a vote into the territories for $200 while it" would cost "the South $1500."[19] The *Knoxville Register* hoped that the South would present "a united front against the mean and despicable dogma of squatter sovereignty." The *Memphis Appeal* was "filled with painful foreboding at the prospects of the Democratic Party being slaughtered in the house of its friends."[20] Broken down, despondent and tired, after a tedious train journey, the Tennessee delegates finally reached home. Gustavus A. Henry, one of Tennessee's delegates to the national Union convention, meeting them on his way to Baltimore, described them as "just like the broken columns of Napoleon's army on their return from the conflict before the walls of Moscow."

[17]This discussion of the Charleston convention is based upon the proceedings, published in pamphlet form, and upon contemporary accounts in Tennessee newspapers.
[18]*Appeal*, May 12, 16.
[19]*Union and American*, May 2.
[20]May 23.

Well might Henry exult, for the Union convention was in happy contrast to the disrupted, discordant Democratic meeting at Charleston. On the second ballot, the convention nominated John Bell for president. The platform was simply: "The Constitution, the Union and the Enforcement of the Laws." No mention was made of slavery. Neill S. Brown, former governor of Tennessee and a delegate to the convention, voiced his approval: "I would not swap the Union for all the niggers, and all the manufactories and all the railroads in this country and all the ships which swim the ocean."[21]

Back home in Tennessee the Democrats scorned the Union party platform as meaningless and its leader as anti-Southern. Bell was accused of being "untrue to the South." He had voted with John Quincy Adams, thirty years before, against the gag resolutions which forbade the reception by Congress of anti-slavery petitions. He was denounced because in 1850 he had supported abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia. Furthermore, he was falsely accused of liberating forty negroes and even of owning no slaves.[22]

Party supporters argued away these accusations. Bell, they claimed, had voted in favour of the reception of the hated anti-slavery petitions only because the Constitution guaranteed the right of petition. The slave trade in the District of Columbia harmed rather than helped the cause of slavery; the sight of chained blacks escorted through the streets of the capital city was an unaccustomed sight to foreigners and to Northern visitors and therefore the more revolting. These strangers thus saw only the admittedly unfortunate aspects of the "peculiar institution." It was to the interest of the South that the District of Columbia be spared the sight of slave marts, slave pens, and negro chain gangs. A Union leader said: "If Bell is not sound on the slavery question then John C. Calhoun was an abolitionist and William L. Yancey is a Black Republican." Bell was described as "a Southern man with national principles, ready to do justice to the whole country."[23]

After the Constitutional Union party had named its candidate and before the two factions of the Democratic party named theirs,

[21] *Patriot*, May 16, 18; *Republican Banner*, May 15, 16.
[22] *Union and American*, May 19.
[23] *Patriot*, May 16, June 16; *Republican Banner*, Sept. 29.

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the party that was destined to win the election without the aid of a single Southern state held its national convention at Chicago. To the momentary disarming of Southern radicals, the Republicans nominated not the well known and well hated William H. Seward, but instead the little known Abraham Lincoln. The "irrepressible conflict" doctrine of Seward had excited fierce denunciation in the South, but for some unaccountable reason Lincoln's declaration, that a "house divided against itself cannot stand," seems to have been little known and was not quoted in advanced Southern circles in Tennessee. The party's platform, which asserted that freedom was the "normal condition of all the territory of the United States," was, of course, denounced. No Tennessee delegates took part in the Republican party's convention, and no attempt was made to organize the party within Tennessee or within most of the other slave states. The Republican party was sectional in its support. The Union party in Tennessee boastfully claimed to be the only national party, unless the Democratic party, which was not likely, should close the breach in its ranks that had been made by the Charleston convention.

The opportunity of the Democrats to reunite their forces came in June with the assembling of the delegates to the adjourned convention at Baltimore. The Tennessee delegation, which, it should be remembered, had not joined the Southern bolters at Charleston, hoped and worked and even prayed for a healing of the breach which would enable the party to present an undivided front to the Republicans. Andrew Johnson sent a letter urging the withdrawal of his name "for the preservation of the only national organization remaining." John K. Howard proposed the readmission to the convention of the Charleston bolters, and threatened that if this were not done, the delegations of Tennessee and five other states would withdraw. Not to be intimidated by this threat, Douglas men from the Northwest gave notice that they would leave the convention should the Charleston bolters be reseated. Virginia's delegates withdrew. The Tennessee delegation retired "for consultation." The twenty-four Tennesseeans could come to no common decision. Influenced, perhaps, by Governor Isham G. Harris who was in Baltimore, though not as a delegate, nineteen decided to join the bolters. The remaining delegates decided to remain with the Douglas wing of the party. One of them, W. E. B. Jones, charged the nineteen with fighting,

not for principle, but against one man, with allowing "the wormy prejudice" against Douglas to sever the party. Thus the Tennessee Democracy split. With most of those who opposed him now no longer in the convention, Douglas received the nomination.[24]

Meanwhile the Charleston bolters had met at Richmond, only to adjourn and await the action of the Baltimore convention. On the invitation of the Tennesseeans they joined the Baltimore bolters. In this new convention Andrew Ewing "thanked God that he was now on a floor where he could speak without being hissed, or being compelled to listen to nauseating speeches." A platform, virtually the Tennessee platform of January, demanding Congressional protection of slavery in the territories, was adopted, and John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky was nominated for the presidency.[25]

There were thus four presidential candidates in the field. In Tennessee, Lincoln received no support; Douglas sentiment was relatively weak, though he showed considerable strength in West Tennessee; the contest was between Breckinridge and Bell.

The weakness of Douglas in Tennessee was due in part to the fact that the Democratic state organization and most of the Democratic newspapers were controlled by the Breckinridge group. With heavy hearts the Douglas Democrats faced the summer's work. Late in the campaign, they attempted a state organization; they assembled in a special party convention at Nashville on July 28, of which V. K. Stevenson of Davidson was made president. Harvey M. Waterson introduced resolutions formally endorsing Douglas. Candidates for positions as presidential electors were named.[26] These, like the nominees of the other parties, engaged in an active canvass of the state. Henry S. Foote and William H. Polk, were particularly active as campaign speakers.

The *Memphis Appeal* was Douglas' main organ in the state. It carried at its "masthead" the emblem of a strutting chanticleer proclaiming the dawn of a better day. "Little-Giant" clubs were organized at several points in and near Memphis. Meetings were held in July and August to ratify the nomination of Douglas, who was proclaimed the "undoubted choice of the great mass of North-

[24] *Appeal*, June 22; *Patriot*, June 25; *Baltimore Sun* and *Cincinnati Commercial*, in Nelson scrap book.
[25] *Republican Banner*, June 13, 26; *Union and American*, June 23, 24; *Patriot*, June 26; clippings in Nelson scrap book.
[26] *Republican Banner*, July 29.

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ern Democrats for the presidency" and, therefore, "the one hope" of the country against Lincoln. Moreover, his supporters argued, he was not a sectional candidate on a sectional platform, like Lincoln and Breckinridge; on the contrary, he was the national leader of the national wing of his party. His platform represented a happy middle ground between Congressional abolitionists in the North and Congressional protectionists in the South. Popular sovereignty, or the right of a people in a territory to govern themselves, Douglasites declared, was a fundamental principle of the American Revolution. Protectionism was un-democratic, un-American, and actually would defeat its own ends, for as Congress became increasingly abolitionist, it would be the less likely to protect slavery in a territory against the wishes of the inhabitants.[27]

Douglas Democrats devoted much of their attention to arguments against disunion. They reminded the supporters of Breckinridge that the first great secession occurred in heaven. Just such a "foul revolution" had been reenacted at Charleston when that convention was broken up by Breckinridge conspirators. A meeting at Shelbyville formally resolved that "the secession convention was upheld by open and avowed disunionists, having for their prime object the destruction of the nationality of the Democratic Party, in order to the perfection of their Southern Confederacy schemes." The *Greeneville Democrat* believed that the bolting of the Alabama delegation at Charleston was the "work of Yancey designed to further his object of a dissolution of the Union." Citizens were urged to vote for Douglas if they desired to "cut off the hydra heads of disunion, secession and nullification."[28]

The Breckinridge Democrats, with such men of prominence as Governor Isham G. Harris, Landon C. Haynes, W. C. Whitthorne, Gideon J. Pillow, and A. O. P. Nicholson as speakers, conducted a vigorous campaign in all parts of the state. The burden of their addresses was the usual attack upon the "mean and damnable dogma of squatter sovereignty" which would exclude the South from the territories. At Murfreesboro, General Bate said: "The power of Congress to legislate for the territories is to protect the citizens and property and not to declare what is property." John H. Crozier of Knoxville declared that squatter sovereignty would lead to the same results as would Black Republicanism. "Lincoln

[27] *Appeal*, Mar. 20, Apr. 17, July 10, 21, Aug. 14, 22.
[28] *Ibid.*, July 28, Oct. 27.

wants to pen up slavery in the Southern States," he said, "and rob the states of their rights in the territories and finally to make the number of slaves so great in the cotton planting states that they will rise up against their masters and the South will become a waste, howling wilderness." Breckinridge leaders contended that a vote for Douglas or Bell was a vote for Lincoln, whose election would work the annihilation of the Anglo-Saxon South and the establishment in its place of "a race of mulattoes, quadroons, mustees, and what not." Just how Lincoln was to effect these changes was not explained. Breckinridge orators emphasized the contention that secession would be justified on the ground that the "Constitution of the Fathers" was already dead, killed by Northern abolitionists and by Northern states that had passed "personal liberty laws" and so defeated the operation of the Fugitive Slave Law which rested on a Constitutional guarantee.[29]

Of all Breckinridge orators in the campaign in Tennessee, easily the most dramatic and picturesque was that able advocate of secession, William L. Yancey of Alabama. At Nashville, the people attempted to snatch away the horses and themselves draw their idol's carriage which was wedged through the crowd only with great difficulty. Yancey felt an egotistical joy in the fear that his name had awakened in the hearts of Union-loving Tennesseeans. "I am reported," he said, "as being seven feet tall and subsisting on a diet of little negro boys." He boasted that among the hills of East Tennessee, mothers calmed their little ones with the lullaby, "Hush ye, little Pet, Bill Yancey will not get ye." At Memphis, Yancey announced: "All that the South asks is the compact which my fathers made with their fathers. But when that compact is trampled under foot, I am absolved from all allegiance to that government. My allegiance is due to the subverted government." From the east portico of the capitol at Nashville, to an audience of fifteen thousand persons, he put the question: "If the Federal Government was not formed to protect slave-property, what was it formed for?" At Knoxville he told an audience of three thousand: "The territory is common property. The Massachussetts man may go there with his clocks, the slave owner with his slaves. To deny the right to the Alabaman is to deny him equality with the clock peddler of Massachussetts."

[29] *Union and American*, June 27, Aug. 28, Sept. 9, 12.

Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey and Colonel John H. Crozier led the Knoxville citizens in applause.[30]

As the campaign advanced the Breckinridge press, the *Knoxville Register*, for example, advocated armed preparations in case of resisted secession. From Alabama, Tennessee was invaded by an organization that was being rapidly extended through the South, known as the Minute Men. At Memphis they were especially strong. Their motto was "Resistance to Lincoln is obedience to God." They boldly declared war on the Constitution and the Union and advocated the formation of a Southern confederacy. On all public occasions they appeared arrayed in black glazed caps with the letters, "M. M.," in red. With "proper drill and discipline" it was expected that the Minute Men would furnish "an army strong enough to maintain any independent movement" that might be made by the Southern states.[31]

Nevertheless, there was at least one prominent Breckinridge Democrat in Tennessee who regretted the threats of secession that leaders of his party were making. This man was Andrew Johnson. During the summer of 1860, Johnson advocated the election of Breckinridge as a means of defeating Bell and the Black Republican, Lincoln. He could not know that four years hence he would be the running mate of Lincoln whom he now denounced. He did not, however, take a prominent part in the campaign, and he regretted Yancey's visit to Knoxville as "a bad day's work."[32] Furthermore, it was reported that "the slavery agitation had become nauseating to his stomach."[33]

In East Tennessee, where the slave population was relatively small, there were many men who, like Johnson, dreaded secession and were unmoved by the pro-slavery arguments of such fire-eaters as Yancey. They were not terrified even by the prospect of a Republican president. One of T. A. R. Nelson's correspondents from Kingston[34] wrote that he had grown weary of "the everlasting, and infernal nigger." "Lincoln," he said, "cannot do more to destroy this great country than his immediate predecessor." Oliver P. Temple of Knoxville expressed his private

[30] *Patriot*, Oct. 27; *Union and American*, Aug. 16, 30, Oct. 19, 27, Nov. 6; *Knoxville Register*, Sept. 20.
[31] *Republican Banner*, Nov. 1; *Union and American*, Oct. 23; *Gazette*, Oct. 20, Nov. 16.
[32] *Patriot*, Sept. 24.
[33] *Republican Banner*, Nov. 3.
[34] Etheridge G. Sevier, Dec. 25, Nelson Mss.

opinion of the relative merits of the Democratic and Republican parties in a private letter to a friend.[35] "How could you suppose I had any thought of becoming a Democrat?" he wrote. "I can never fall so low as that. In conviction, in principle, in feeling, in taste, and in manners I am opposed to Democracy. I am not certain whether I hate or despise or fear it most. I am sometimes tempted to think it Antichrist. . . . I believe the time has come when we, all the good and true, must grapple with Democracy as our greatest foe and destroy it or be devoured by it. . . . I should apprehend no danger from the temporary triumph of the Republican party. After the ranks of Democracy were broken it would then be easy to organize a great conservative Whig Party."

William G. Brownlow charged that the Breckinridge Democrats were secessionists and had "one idea and that was nigger, and in this issue they were willing to sink all others as well as sink and damn the country." "Disunionists," "Yanceyites," "Secessionists," were the terms of opprobrium hurled against the radical Democratic faction. Colonel John Netherland warned the mountaineers of Hawkins county that a vote for Breckinridge was a vote for the dissolution of the Union, that the poor people of Tennessee, the non-slave holders, had nothing to gain in a war for slavery. "Let the people who own niggers, protect 'em," was the slogan used in the mountains.[36]

Alarmed at the progress of the Breckinridge supporters, the leaders of the Constitutional Union party concentrated their efforts upon an appeal to the strong love of the Union that existed in Tennessee. With a firm conviction that the preservation of the Union depended upon their victory at the polls, they prosecuted their campaign with unbounded zeal. Among their numerous and able campaigners were Bailie Peyton, Neill S. Brown, Gustavus A. Henry, Nat G. Taylor, Horace Maynard, T. A. R. Nelson, and Oliver P. Temple. "Shall we sit calmly by," questioned Henry, "and see this glorious Union dissolved by Fire-eaters and abolitionists?" He boasted: "I know no distinction between the people of Massachussetts and Maine, Tennessee and Louisiana; I hold them as brothers all." The Nashville *Patriot* asked: "Are you ready to see your great and glorious country torn into 'dishonored fragments' for . . . fancied, or at least for partial, distant

[35]To A. A. Doak, Jan. 9, Temple Mss. in the University of Tennessee Library.
[36]*Brownlow's Whig* (Knoxville), July 19; *Union and American*, Aug. 16, Oct. 19.

and contingent wrongs?" The memory of Andrew Jackson was appealed to. "Were Jackson living," Bellites claimed, "he would certainly denounce the Breckinridge-Yancey doctrine of secession as intolerable." Any one would "gladden the spirit of the old Hero who would vote against secession and disunion." Tennessee could save the Union, it was claimed, for the cotton states would never precipitate a revolution unless encouraged by a belief that Tennessee and Kentucky and the other border slave states would join the "traitors." "Let the world see the gallant Volunteer state arrayed on the side of the Union," urged the *Republican Banner*, "and Union men all over the country will take heart and treason shrink to its hole."[37]

The Union campaigners explained the untenability of secession and the tragedy that it would entail. Even if Lincoln should be elected, they asserted, the government would still be safe. Disunion would mean "affliction, bloodshed, the worst of war—a contest between brothers of the same household." Moreover, the impracticability of civil war was evident. Millions would have to be spent in garrisoning the frontiers from Delaware Bay to the Rio Grande in order to prevent the escape of fugitive slaves. Every harbour on the sea coast would have to be guarded. "The dream of a Southern Confederacy" was a wild vision. When Colonel Taylor at Knoxville described the horrors of disunion and civil war, the audience was deeply touched. Parson Brownlow reported that he had "never at any political speaking . . . seen as many persons bathed in tears at any one time," and he thought that the speaker's appeal in behalf of the Union was "overwhelming, crushing and killing in its effect upon the Breckinridge party." T. A. R. Nelson "had no arithmetic by which to compute the value of the Union"; it was "beyond all power of human conception." The Constitutional Union party alone offered to the country guarantees of peace and restoration of harmony, whereas Lincoln promised "only a continuation of sectional strife and agitation, . . . Breckinridge and his slave code promised the country nothing better," while "Douglas and Squatter Sovereignty did not afford a safe asylum from the dangers of either Republicanism or Breckinridge-Yanceyism."[38]

Without a platform, evading the question of slavery, and prating

[37] *Patriot*, Oct. 16, Nov. 5, 6.
[38] *Republican Banner*, Aug. 15, 18, Sept. 18; *Patriot*, Sept. 26, 28, Oct. 11, 15, 22.

only of the salvation of the country, the Constitutional Union party bent its efforts toward parade and pageantry rather than toward the metaphysical arguments concerning constitutional rights that rejoiced the heart of Yancey or of Douglas. Bell was frequently serenaded at Nashville, while fireworks, rockets, Roman candles, and Bengal lights whizzed in every direction. "Bell Segars" and "Bell Pipes" were advertised in papers that supported the Union cause. At numerous political rallies the basket dinner outdid in popularity the barbecue that was familiar to the other parties. At Murfreesboro, tables extending one mile in length groaned under the fat of the land. Often rations were dispensed "with gracious liberality and abundance" by the "fair daughters of Tennessee" who exhibited great interest and devotion to the cause of the Union and the Constitution. The old custom of pole raising was revived. At Lebanon a "Union Liberty Pole," one hundred and fifty feet high, was raised on the public square. Columbia boasted of the "Union Guards," Franklin, the "Bell Ringers," Murfreesboro, the "Bell Stars" while Nashville exhibited her youth in three companies known as the "Bell Grays," the "Bell Highlanders," and even the "Bell Blues." This "grand army of the Union" met speakers at the depot and conducted them to a grove or to a park where a stand had been erected. The several campaign companies appeared in dashing uniforms. The "Bell Stars" of Murfreesboro were resplendant in brown cloth coats and trousers, faced and trimmed with black velvet. The dark brown hats were surmounted with plumes, sable for the privates, and bright yellow for the officers. The front of the hat bore a large brass plate bell, in the centre of which was a star. They paraded by day and met by night at "early gas lighting."[39]

In Maryville, a procession was headed by a wagon bearing a large bell. Such ringing and shouting had not been heard since 1840. Torch-light processions, some two miles in length, banners and transparencies with the recurring bell as the emblem of the party, were customary. At Nashville, a procession one mile in length was led by a float on which a soldier in complete armor brandished in one hand a sword, in the other a bleeding head while one foot rested upon a headless effigy in human shape representing "Disunion." On the eve of the election, Nashville was treated to

[39]*Republican Banner*, Aug. 29, Sept. 26, Oct. 13; *Patriot*, May 28, Aug. 29, Oct. 18, 19.

a remarkable procession headed by a steamboat thirty or forty feet long which had been dragged up from the river by a team of horses. It was fitly labeled "Constitution." Its armament of six guns kept up a cannonading all along the route. It was followed by three printing presses on wheels which printed circulars during the parade and scattered them among the people. At Murfreesboro, a Union procession featured "fifty beautiful young ladies" on horseback, all dressed in flowing black riding habits. "The spirit of '76" was inscribed upon a banner which bore handsome portraits of Bell and Everett.[40]

And so election day dawned. This stirring appeal was made to the unenfranchised: "Ladies of Tennessee, like the noble women of the Revolution who moulded bullets for their fathers, brothers, and husbands,—you can prepare Union tickets for the ballot box, on the morning of the election. Clip the tickets from the papers, fold them and place them in your sweetheart's watch fob, and bid them do their duty like men." The Nashville *Patriot* implored: "We appeal to all the matrons of the country when they rise this morning, to give their blessings to their sons and send them forth to give the arduous and industrious service of this day to their country."

Election day passed. The Union party had carried the state; Bell received 69,710 votes; Breckinridge, 65,053; and Douglas, only 11,384. Bell's strength was in the old Whig strongholds. He received a majority in East Tennessee, where particularly heavy votes for the Constitutional Union party were polled in Blount, Jefferson, Knox, and Sevier counties, and a plurality in West Tennessee. Breckinridge received a majority in the traditionally Democratic section of Middle Tennessee. Here, however, Bell carried Nashville and other old Whig centers. In East Tennessee, Breckinridge carried the counties of Washington, Sullivan, and Greene by large majorities. These counties had long been centers of Democratic strength. Douglas carried only one county in the state, Tipton, and ran second in only six counties, all of them in West Tennessee within a hundred mile radius of Memphis. In Shelby county, including Memphis, he lacked only ninety votes of defeating Bell, while Breckinridge ran a poor third.[41]

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[40] *Republican Banner*, Aug. 18, Oct. 18; *Patriot*, Oct. 26, Nov. 6.

[41] These statistics are from the *Republican Banner*, Dec. 4, and differ slightly, but not materially, from those in the *Union and American*.

Tennessee thus gave her electoral votes to John Bell, but Abraham Lincoln, who had received no votes in Tennessee, was elected to the presidency. With the election of the Black Republican, the old parties disappeared; party lines which had held fairly firmly during the campaign of 1860 were broken, and the state soon faced the problem of whether it should give its support to the Southern Confederacy that was formed in 1861 or to the Union. Many of the supporters of Bell and of Breckinridge and of Douglas united to oppose secession. But from these three groups also were men, eventually more numerous, who supported the movement for an independent and united South and were ready, in the words of Yancey, to "seize their muskets and rush forward and achieve another Southern Yorktown."[42]

[42]*Republican Banner*, Oct. 26.