

## John Mosby on the Silver Issue, 1895

### Introduction

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In the late nineteenth century, Democrats and Republicans fought over whether the gold standard ought to be retained or if the United States should switch to a free silver system.

In 1890, the Sherman Silver Purchase Act was passed, increasing the amount of silver purchased by the government. In 1893, Democratic President Grover Cleveland successfully pushed for the act's repeal. Cleveland's anti-silver measures split the Democratic Party, however, as many Democrats were silver supporters. By the election year of 1896, the Democratic Party had been taken over by silverites.

In July 1897, former Virginia Confederate commander John S. Mosby wrote to his friend Sam Chapman about the nation's monetary plan and its impact on politics. After the Civil War, Mosby had become a Republican, supporting Ulysses S. Grant and earning the ire of his fellow Southerners. Mosby's views were aligned with the Republican Party, supporting the gold standard and repudiating a switch to free silver. To Chapman, Mosby writes, "You know that I have always been opposed to full coinage of silver." He points to Republican concerns about inflation, asserting that "You can't make people richer by debasing the currency. If the people want cheap money give them old Confederate notes." Mosby also takes some satisfaction from the effects of Cleveland's anti-silver measures on the Democratic Party, writing, "Cleveland has certainly done two good things - he has sat down the silver craze, & he has broken up the Democratic party - I wd. not be surprised if Kentucky goes Republican this fall."

### Excerpt

I sent you two of Carlisle's speeches on the silver question - You know that I have always been opposed to free coinage of silver. It is simply a new phase of the old greenback lunacy - If you had one barrel of sugar & were to put enough sand in it to fill two barrels wd. you have any more sugar? You can't make people richer by debasing the currency. If the people want cheap money give them old Confederate notes - If the mere fiat of Government can create money why not make it out of iron, & decree that pound of gold shall be equal to a pound of iron - after the iron is coined. Cleveland has certainly done two good things - he has sat down on the silver craze, & he has broken up the Democratic party - I wd. not be surprised if Kentucky goes Republican this fall.

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## Image

Capt: S. A. Chapman - 930 - Bush S. S. A.  
 Dear Sam - July 25<sup>th</sup> - #1

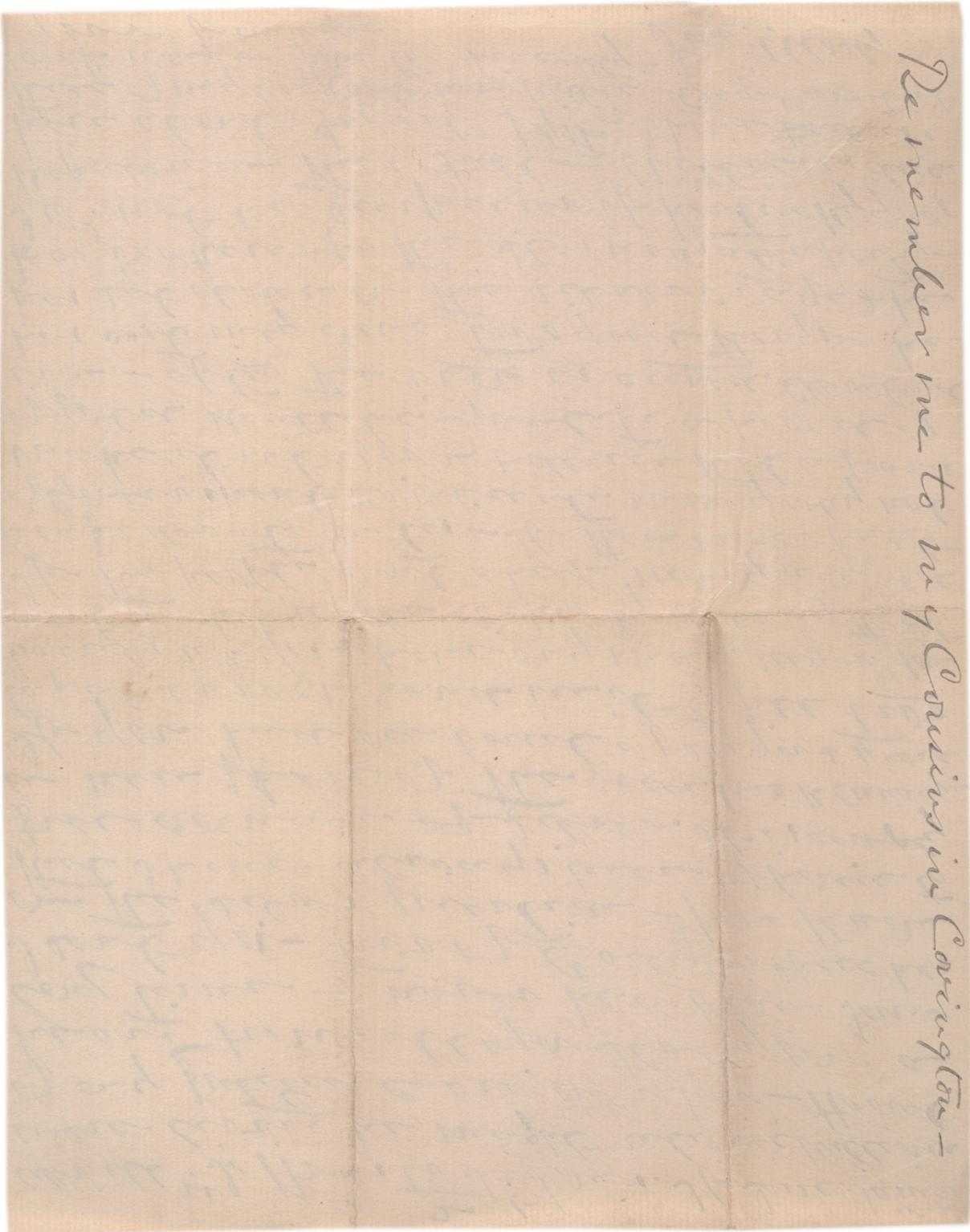
I have just rec<sup>d</sup> the enclosed from Willie - You see that he is both improving his mind as well as filling his purse. He is fond of reading & I encourage him in it - in this way he will prepare himself for something better - There are a good many books on the steamer, most of wh. he has read. This voyage I got home several to read - among them the Memoirs of S. S. Prentiss whom I regard as one of the most lovable <sup>characters</sup> that ever lived - Willie writes me that he has been transferred to S. Louis - Got a letter from Manson a few days ago - he had not arrived but Manson was looking for him & had invited him to stay sometime with him - He will like S. Louis - Manson knows a great many nice people there - I had a splendid time there last winter - Shall stop there again on my way East in September - when I hope also to see you. Will you see my lost article in 'Once a Week'? I have been feeling a great deal of anxiety about Aunt - he has been very sick with typhoid fever - but is now recovering. I don't suppose Willie will take

John S. Mosby to Sam Chapman, July 25, 1897 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03921.01)

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ad ill<sup>2</sup>. I wish to <sup>2</sup>J. Louis. If Jane James  
 were living he might relieve William  
 of any future care over her - Had not  
 heard from Major Sholly for a  
 long time - never heard from you -  
 I sent you two of Cordigli's speeches  
 on the silver question - You know  
 that I have always been opposed to  
 free coinage of silver. It is simply  
 a new phase of the greenback lunacy -  
 If you had one barrel of sugar & were  
 to put enough soda in it - to fill two  
 barrels w<sup>d</sup> you have only one sugar. You  
 can't make people richer by debasing the cur-  
 rency. If the people want cheap money give <sup>them</sup> old  
 Confederate notes - If there were fiat  
 of government can create money why not  
 make it out of iron & decree that a pound  
 of gold shall be equal to a pound of  
 iron - after the iron is coined. Cleveland  
 has certainly done two good things - he  
 has put down on the silver craze & he  
 has broken up the Democratic party -  
 I w<sup>d</sup> not be surprised if Kentucky goes  
 Republican this fall - Willie is due  
 here about August 14<sup>th</sup> - I have ~~two~~ all  
 three of my boys ~~at~~ here Willie - Clay - Ernest at  
 work now - Love to sincerely -  
 J. W. Mosby (over)

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## John Mosby on the Silver Issue, 1895

### Transcript

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John S. Mosby to Sam Chapman, July 25, 1897 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03921.01)

Capt: S.F. Chapman

930 – Bush S<sup>t</sup>. S.F.

Dear Sam –

July 25<sup>th</sup> –

I have just rec<sup>d</sup>. the enclosed from Willie – You see that he is both improving his mind as well as filling his purse. He is fond of reading & I encourage him in it – in this way he will prepare himself for something better – There are a good many books on the steamer, most of wh. he has read. This voyage I gave him several to read, among them The Memoirs of S.S. Prentiss, whom I regard as one of the most lovable [*inserted*: & wonderful] men that ever lived – William writes me that he has been transferred to S<sup>t</sup>. Louis – Got a letter from [Munson] a few days ago – he had not arrived but Munson was looking for him & had invited him to stay sometime with him – He will like S<sup>t</sup>. Louis – Munson knows a great many nice people there – I had a splendid time there last winter – Shall stop there again on my way East in September – when I hope also to see you. Did you see my last article in ‘Once a Week’? I have been feeling a great deal of anxiety about Fount – he has been very sick with Typhoid Fever – but is now recovering. I don’t suppose William will take [2] old M<sup>rs</sup>. Jeffries to S<sup>t</sup>. Louis. If Jesse James were living he might relieve William of any future care over her. Haven’t heard from Major Dolly for a long time – never hear from Tom – I sent you two of Carlisle’s speeches on the silver question – You know that I have always been opposed to full coinage of silver. It is simply a new phase of the old greenback currency – If you had one barrel of sugar & were to put enough sand in it to fill two barrels w<sup>d</sup>. you have any more sugar? You can’t make people richer by debasing the currency. If the people want cheap money give [*inserted*: them] old Confederate notes – If the mere fiat of Government can create money why not make it out of iron, & declare that pound of gold shall be equal to a pound of iron – after the iron is coined. Cleveland has certainly done two good things – he has sat down the silver craze, & he has broken up the Democratic party – I w<sup>d</sup>. not be surprised if Kentucky goes Republican this fall – Willie is due here about August 14<sup>th</sup> – I have [*struck*: had] all three of my boys ([*struck*: at here] Willie – Clay – & Ernest) at work now. Love to your family.

## John Mosby on the Silver Issue, 1895

Sincerely –

Jno: S. Mosby

[3] Remember me to my Cousins in Covington –