

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, May 30, 1891 to February 6, 1892)

## A Woman's Vengeance

By William H. Mackoy May 30, 1891

There have been many seasons of intense political excitement in the state of Kentucky, but party feeling never ran to high in that state and the passions of men were never more thoroughly aroused than at the period of the contest between the old court and the new court party.

Constitutional government itself was on trial. The right of the Supreme Court of the state to pronounce invalid an act of the General Assembly extending the term of stay of judgments upon contracts made before its passage until certain conditions were complied with, was not only questioned but was denied by the majority of the legislative body. Attempts to impeach and remove by address the judges of the Court of Appeals whose term of office was for life or during good behavior, having failed for want of the requisite two thirds vote, in 1824 the General Assembly with the approval of the governor, passed an act constituting a new Court of Appeals, and thenceforward for two years, two Courts of Appeals were in session in the capital of the state.

Upon the old court side were ranged nine-tenths of the lawgivers, most of the merchants and large land-owners, while to the new court party were gathered "every one that was in distress, every one that was in doubt, everyone that was discontented," and the usual rabble of camp following politicians, headed by the Governor of the state.

Prominent among the leaders of the new Court could and party was Col. Solomon P. Sharp. He had been a member of the bar of the town of Bowling Green, a representative for several years in the General Assembly from the County of Warren, a member of Congress from 1813 to 1819, and afterwards Attorney General of the state.

In 1825 he was solicited by the governor of the state to resign the office of attorney general and become a candidate for the lower house of the General

Assembly from the county in which Frankfort is situated that he might assume the leadership of the new Court party in that body.

He is described by contemporary of opposite politics “as a man of talent, much beyond mediocrity, in many respects of the highest grade; zealous for his client, dexterous to meet into parry the efforts of his adversary, but too ingenious and too ready, in the invention of subtle defenses for his mind always to have the strongest affinity to sound judgment and correct conclusions, defending a false position with as much zeal as one which was true, and wanting in that sincerity which inspires confidence. In temper he was neither rational nor violent. His mode of speaking was persuasive and mild. Upon the question which agitated the state he affirmed the attack upon the judiciary and the reorganizing act to be impolite and unwise but contended the Legislature had the constitutional power to pass the act.”

The rumor had long been current that before his marriage he had seduced a beautiful, intelligent, and respectable young lady of Bowling Green, Miss Anne Cooke, whose family and relations had aided him when he first came to the bar. The effect of the rumor was such that, soon after his marriage, and upon receiving the appointment of Attorney General he changed his residence to Frankfort, the home of his wife's family. When he became a candidate for the General Assembly in 1825, the new Court party, apprehensive of the renewal of the rumor and of its effect upon his candidacy, attempted to discredit it in advance by the statement that derogatory reports would be made for political purposes. The Argus, the new court organ in Frankfort, edited by Amos Kendall, who was afterwards a member of President Jackson's Kitchen Cabinet and Post Master general of the United States, in announcing in its issue of June 29th, 1825, the candidacy of Sharp, said editorially, “already we are informed that Mr. Sharp is to be most ruthlessly assailed both in his public and private character and even that the weapons have been secretly prepared for months. It is well.

It cannot be expected that a party which has assailed even Mr. Barry with a rancor and falsehood which only devils can excell, will spare Mr. Sharp or any other man who thrusts himself athwart the path of their ambitions.. It is their plan in this year's campaign to attempt the destruction of the peoples' cause by destroying the characters of those who support it. Every tale which even circulated to the discredit of one of the peoples' advocates, whether true or false, is raked from the kernel of oblivion and trumpeted through the world, and when they cannot find old tales they manufacture new ones—

In the present contest we shall leave to the Court party in the honor of wielding this warfare, satisfied that in Franklin County it can only sink them lower in proportion to their efforts to rise by its assistance.”

Contrary to the expectations of Sharp's friends the weapons of calumny and abuse were not made use of, but so apprehensive were they that attacks upon his private character might be made when it would be too late to refute them that they caused the report to be circulated that the midwife, who had been with Miss Cooke when she was delivered of a stillborn child, had made a certificate that the infant was a mulatto.

When this report was given circulation Miss Cooke was a married woman, having become the wife of Jeraboam O. Beauchamp in June 1824. The little that is now known of Beauchamp and his wife, their courtship and marriage, is gathered from a small volume written by Beauchamp himself, now out-of-print and rare, chiefly, it is said, through the efforts of the relatives and descendents of Sharp and his wife to support it.

The style of the book, although somewhat marred by grammatical errors is as direct and simple as that of any of the writing of Defoe or Fielding.

From his own account Beauchamp was the son of a respectable farmer. In this position he was somewhat mild, eccentric, ungovernable, and volatile. Shortly before the story of sharp's conduct towards Miss Cooke gained publicity he had begun the study of law in the town of Glasgow within the circuit on which Sharp practiced.

Attracted by Sharp's manner at the bar he was about to solicit permission to enter his law office in Bowling Green, but the indignation aroused by the story of Sharp's treachery prevented his doing so. The removal of Miss Cooke and her mother from Bowling Green to a small farm not far from that upon which Beauchamp's father resided, and in the same county, afforded Beauchamp an opportunity of calling upon her, but she refused to see him until he had made frequent visits. She was probably several years older than Beauchamp, who had not been attained his majority. He soon became a daily visitor, and, in a short time, solicited her hand in marriage. A refusal only caused him to urge his suit with more ardor until at last Ms. Cooke told him of the wrongs she had suffered. That her heart would never cease to ache unto Col. Sharp should die through his instrumentality, that while he lived she would feel unworthy of love, but that she would kiss the hand and adore the person who would avenge her. Beauchamp was more than willing to accept her upon the conditions that she named, and it was agreed that the

marriage should take place after the death of Sharp, who was to be killed upon the occasion of one of his visits to Bowling Green.

But the opportunity to kill Sharp in Bowling Green, where sympathy for Miss Cooke would have rendered Beauchamp's acquittal probable, not presenting itself, and a visit to Frankfort undertaken by Beauchamp for the purpose of provoking an attack from Sharp not being fruitful of results, Beauchamp and Miss Cooke after a long engagement were married in June 1824, soon after his admission to the bar.

Possibly if the rumor, said to have been put in circulation by Sharp and his friends, that the child born to Miss Cooke was a mulatto, had not reached the years of Beauchamp and his wife, they might in time have gotten over their desire for revenge. Beauchamp was young, vigorous fond of his life, unwilling to throw it away, and anxious if he should kill Sharp to do it in such a way as that he might not incur the penalty of the law. He was proud of his wife and devotedly attached to her. The pleasure he found in her society made life to him more attractive than it had ever been.

It is reasonable therefore to suppose that but for the indiscretion of Sharp's friends in reviving old rumors and attempting to discredit them lest they might be turned to advantage by his political adversaries Sharp might have died in the fullness of years and honors, while Beauchamp and wife, in the quiet of the country life and in their affection for each other, might have found solace for the troubles of their youth and have learned to grow old gracefully.

The story of the mulatto child, however kindled again and with greater intensity the indignation of Beauchamp and his wife. Years have elapsed since the commission by Sharp of the original offense. That he should now, to compass political ends and to aggrandize himself, permit an old and almost forgotten scandal to be revived with added circumstances tending to degrade the person who's fair name and reputation he had destroyed, seemed to Beauchamp to place him beyond the protection of the law and to render him one of those monsters whose death was demanded by the best sentiments of society. Sunday evening, November 6th, 1825 the places of public entertainment in the little town of Frankfort, the capital of Kentucky were full of guests. The General Assembly was to convene the next day in regular session. Members had been arriving for several days by stage, private convenience, and on horseback. Candidates for the petty offices to be

filled by the General Assembly were on hand with their friends buttonholing Senators and Representatives.

Strangers were in attendance with no particular business but drawn thither to witness the opening proceedings of the legislative session that promised to be of more than usual interest. A few prominent politicians had put in an appearance to look after their own interests, or to make the acquaintance of the new members. The fortune of a new court party was waning and it seemed likely that it would be unable to pursue further its revolutionary schemes. It still had the Governor and the Senate, but the House of Representatives, as the result of the preceding August election had probably passed from its control.

Sharp with his easy gentle and persuasive manner, his ability to shift his positions and change his opinion so as to conform gracefully to the prevailing public sentiment, whenever that might happen to be, had been put forward by the new Court party as its candidate for speaker of the House of Representatives, and it was thought likely that his personal popularity might accrue votes for him from some of the less pronounced members of the old Court party. Upon the evening mentioned he was in the office of the Mansion house, the principal Hotel of Frankfort, shaking hands and chatting first with one and then with another of his fellow members of the lower House.

Upon the same evening an athletic young fellow, with sunburned face and dusty clothing, rode up to the Mansion House in search of entertainment for himself and his horse only to find that the hotel was full. At Weissger's where he next made application, Sacre, the barkeeper told him that they could give him a cot but could not take his horse and referred him to the boarding house on Mr. Joel Scott, the warden of the penitentiary, whither he went and found the accommodation he wanted.

Facing the street that forms the West and boundary of the Capital Square at Frankfort, with a pleasant outlook over the blue grass sward that surrounds the Greek temple that served the purpose of a State House for Kentucky, there stands today a square, old-fashioned house with a hole in the center, which, with its fresh coat of light paint, its brown cornices and inside blinds, and the total absence of the meretricious ornaments which marred the architecture of many residences of the present time, has the external appearance of a comfortable home.

This house was the home of Sharp and here, between the hours of one and two o'clock Monday morning, Sharp was called to the slide or alien door by a loud knock. A few minutes later his wife, aroused by then knock and the noise, found his dead body prone on the floor with a knife wound over the region of his heart. She spoke to him, called him by name, addressed him in endearing terms, but "the silver cord was loosed," "the Golden bowl was broken" and the spirit of the ambitious man, prominent in state and national politics, at an age when most men are beginning their career had returned to the God who gave it.

An alarm was given, neighbors came in, Dr. Sharp, who resided in the family of his brother, returned a few moments later from the bedside of a patient he had been visiting, looked upon the dead body of his brother and exclaimed "Great-God, Beauchamp has done this! I always expected it," although it was afterwards denied by him. Mrs. Sharp, nervous and agitated, cried out that she saw the murderer at the alley door. A number of persons ran in the direction of the river but found no one.

At an early hour Monday morning the young gentleman who had stopped at Mr. Joel Scott's the evening before arose and went to the office of the Register of the land office to procure the issue of patents upon plats and certificates of survey which he had sent to the Register by the hands of a friend for record. To his dismay, he found that his friend had never delivered them and that there was no apparent cause for his presence in Frankfort. Recovering his composure he returned to his boarding house for a breakfast. Without embarrassment he heard from the landlord, a relation of Mrs. Sharp, the news of Sharp's murder. He answered coolly the questions Scott put to him, which elicited the fact that his name was Beauchamp, that he had married Ann Cooke and that his occupation was that of a lawyer. His manner disarmed Scott of suspicion.

A half-hour later he was in the saddle, forgetting in the hurry of departure an old handkerchief which he had left upon his bed and upon which his nose had bled some time before. On his way he stopped occasionally to tell acquaintances whom he met the story of Sharp's murder as he had learned it.

Upon the fourth day after his departure from Frankfort, at sunset, he rode up to his own house, where his wife was waiting to receive him. The only witness of his meeting with his wife was his sister, who at some distance from her brother's house, saw him wave a flag as he drew near his wife.

Almost the first act of the General Assembly when it meant was to pass a resolution offering a reward of three thousand dollars for the apprehension and conviction of the murderer of Sharp. The Trustees of the town of Frankfort offered an additional reward of one thousand dollars. Twenty four hours after Beauchamp's return home he was arrested in his own house by persons who followed him from Frankfort, anxious to secure the rewards and take him back to the state capital. The guards who attended him had with them the old handkerchief he had left on his bed, which he adroitly contrived to get possession of and burn without observation or suspicion.

Upon his return to Frankfort he found the public excitement greater than upon the day of the murder. The new Court men had made the charge that the murder had been instigated by their political opponents. Mrs. Sharp, unwilling to believe that her deceased husband had been guilty of the act attributed to him, and desirous of protecting his reputation, had published a letter over her own signature, written, however, it is said, by Francis P Blair, the father of Gen. Francis P and of Montgomery Blair, charging that the death of her husband had been procured for political reasons and that the murderer wherever he was must have had accomplices.

The suggestion that Beauchamp was the murderer was offensive at first to Ms. Sharp and her relations, and Kendall's paper, the Argus, made threats against those who were base enough to insinuate that Beauchamp was the cause of the death of the martyred Sharp. Beauchamp had anticipated that such would be the case, and feeling confident that there was no evidence to connect him with the murder of Sharp except his presence in Frankfort at the time and the fact that he had married Miss Cooke looked forward to an acquittal as the result of this trial.

The examining trial failed to elicit evidence tending to inculcate him, but, at the request of the prosecuting attorney, he consented to remain in custody until it could be ascertained whether other facts could be produced. Meanwhile it began to appear more reasonable to the friends of Mrs. Sharpe, to regard Beauchamp, from his presumed hostility to Sharp, as the willing agent of the old court party, and the fact that he had an active accomplice in the deed itself was stoutly insisted upon and the person plainly indicated as a participant in the crime was one Patrick Henry Darby, a lawyer by profession, a land speculator, a vehement old court party man, and editor of "The Advocate" and of "the Spirit of Seventy Six", an old court organ. The

rumor was that Darby had been expelled from the bar of Tennessee before coming to Kentucky. He was probably not over scrupulous in the use of means to accomplish his ends, but he was a good fighter, enjoyed a controversy, and, like the typical Irishman was ready to hit a head whenever he saw it. The charge that he was privy to or had actually participated in the murder of Sharp was an unfortunate matter for Beauchamp. Upon evidence that was largely manufactured Beauchamp was at last committed for final trial.

Before the final trial came on Darby was active in hunting up testimony. He went into the neighborhood of Beauchamp's home and found a fellow named Lowe, a constable, whom Beauchamp and aided and befriended and whom he supposed he could trust. Darby brought Lowe over to his purposes and sent him to Mrs. Beauchamp to say to her that Darby had offered him money to testify that he had heard Beauchamp threatened to kill Sharp, that he was willing to make affidavit to this before a magistrate, and to swear to anything else against Derby that Beauchamp desired. Mrs. Beauchamp wrote to her husband in regard to Lowe's proposition. Beauchamp, who knew the active part that Darby was taking against him, hated him with such intensity that he was quite willing that Darby should hang in place of himself. He readily fell into the trap prepared for him and sent his wife a statement, to be copied by Lowe, inculpating Darby in an attempt to suborn testimony and adding other facts tending to show that Darby was the guilty person.

Lowe induced Mrs. Beauchamp to let him have the original statement rather than a copy and upon the trial of the case he was an important witness against Beauchamp. Beauchamp's sister had accidentally told him of the incident of her brother waving a flag towards his wife upon his return from Frankfort, and this Lowe enlarged and embellished. This testimony was probably largely false. The defense of Beauchamp by his counsel was able and possibly might have been successful if the public mind had been in a tranquil state. As it was, the result of the trial was a conviction, followed by motion of arrest of judgment, which was overruled, and the sentence of death by hanging was pronounced to be executed June 16th, 1826. Beauchamp asked as a favor that a later day might be fixed for his execution that he might have time to discharge the duty to others by writing on the subject of his death, a favor that the court granted and extended the time of execution to July 7th, 1826.

At that time there was no appeal from a judgment of the Circuit Courts in

felony cases, but Beauchamp's counsel brought his case before the old Court of Appeals and moved for a writ of error with supersedeas to stay the execution of sentence against him on the ground that the offense of murder at the common law had been repealed by acts which made murder a statutory offense and that these acts in turn as well as the acts restricting the court from revising the proceedings of inferior courts in cases of felony had been repealed by the act reorganizing and constituting a new Court of Appeals. The old Court of Appeals did not propose however, to recognize the new governing acts valid for any purpose and denied the application.

After his conviction he entertained for some time the hope of a pardon. He seemed to think that the desire of the new Court party to throw the odium of the crime upon the old court party would secure the exercise of executive clemency in his behalf, and he prepared a statement implicating Darby and intimating that a fuller disclosure would be made when the pardon was granted. He knew that a son of the Governor's had been arrested, twice tried and convicted of murder for the sake of highway robbery, and that members of the new court party claimed that the proofs of the crime in that case had been manufactured by the old court party for political ends, and this induced him the more readily to believe that the same view would be taken by the governor and the new court party in his case.

While making these efforts on his own behalf he was at the same time, busily engaged in writing little volume which gives a brief history of himself and his wife, their courtship and marriage, the circumstances leading up to and connected with the murder of Sharp and the review of his trial and the testimony. It appears from his confession that the crime was planned and executed by himself alone, at the instigation of his wife, for the purpose of avenging Sharp's injuries to her. The knife that inflicted the wound was sharpened by her that it might not fail to accomplish the purpose for which it was intended. Upon his return home after the commission of a crime, when he waved the flag toward his wife, the signal agreed upon between them to show that he had been successful, his wife fell prostrate before him, burst into tears, thanking heaven for the success of the enterprise and clasping her arms about her husband's knees called upon the spirit of her father, brothers and sister to bless and intercede for the protection of her husband. She spent the last days of his life in jail with him and they endeavored unsuccessfully to end their lives together by taking laudanum upon the day before the one appointed for his execution.

The morning of the day of execution Beauchamp attempted to kill himself with a case knife. He succeeded in inflicting upon himself a wound that might have been fatal and not his wife struck his arm and changed the direction of the blow. She then took the knife and inflicted a wound upon herself from which she died an hour later. Beauchamp was carried to the gallows, escorted by two companies of militia attended by a band of music. Just before his execution he called for a glass of water and then asked the band to play "Bonapart's retreat from Moscow". When his request was complied with he urged the officer to be speedy in performing his duty as he had nothing more to say. In a grave-yard near the little town of Bloomfield is the grave which contains the dust of himself and his wife and upon the marble slab over it are these lines written by his wife before her death as an epitaph:

Entombed below, in the other's arms,  
The husband and the wife repose;  
Safe from life's never ending storms,  
And safe from all their cruel foes.

A child of evil fate she lived,  
Of villains wiles her piece had crossed,  
The husband of her heart revived,  
The happiness she gone and lost.

He heard her tale of matchless woe,  
And burning for revenge, he rose;  
And laid the coward villain low,  
And struck dismay to virtues foes.

Reader, if honor's gen'rous blood,  
E're warmed thy breast, here drop a tear  
And let the sympathetic flood,  
Deep in thy mind, its traces bear.

A father or a mother, thou,  
Thy daughter view in grief's despair,  
Then turn and see the villain law,  
Ane here let fall the grateful tear.

A brother or a sister, thou,

Dishonored, see thy sister dear,  
Then turn and see the villain law,  
Ane here let fall the grateful tear.

Daughter of sorroe; most thy tear,  
This tomb of Love and Honor claim;  
For thy revenge the husband here,  
Laid down in zenith, his life and fame.

His wife distained a life forlorn,  
Without her heart's lov'd, honor'd lord;  
Then reader, here, their fortune mourn,  
Who for their Love their life blood pour'd

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